

BRIDGING THE GAPS OF CONSTRUCTION MARKETING FRAMEWORKS FOR CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS ENTERPRISES

Yankah, J.E¹, Aigbavboa, C.O², Thwala, W.D³, Pretorius, JHM⁴,

^{1,2,3&4}Department of Construction Management and Quantity Surveying, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

¹Department of Building Technology, Cape Coast Polytechnic, Cape Coast, Ghana.

Abstract

Mainstream marketing, which was mostly developed for the manufacturing industry, provides little help to the construction industry, and this has resulted in the need for serious improvements in marketing management in the construction industry. However, existing marketing frameworks tailored to suite the construction industry have achieved abysmal results. The paper examines the existing construction marketing framework within the 'expected' and 'attractive' established requirements of frameworks and to determine the extent to which the existing construction marketing frameworks satisfies the requirements. This paper adopts the descriptive study design and the use of literature review as a method supplemented by a focus group discussion to identify, summarize, synthesize extant literature and show the gaps in the existing construction marketing frameworks, in addressing the challenges with marketing in construction. Findings show that existing frameworks fall short of some 'expected' and 'attractive' requirements of frameworks. The need exist for scientific research which focus on the peculiar characteristics of the construction industry to provide empirical basics for developing framework for marketing construction businesses. The paper opens a new direction of construction marketing research which focuses on requirement of frameworks to achieve effective marketing in the construction industry.

Keywords: construction, framework, marketing.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many authors on the marketing of construction services (Bell, 1981; Fisher, 1989; Hillebrandt and Cannon, 1990; Moore, 1984; Morgan and Morgan, 1990; Pearce, 1992; Dikmen et al. 2005; Polat and Domnez, 2010; Polat and Domnez, 2008; Naranjo, 2011, Ojo, 2011) have argued that there are still a number of misconceptions about the appropriateness and benefits of adopting marketing as a management tool in construction business enterprises. Others have also argued that the way marketing is used in the construction industry needs serious improvement (Arditi 1985; Arditi and Mochtar 2000), in order to produce beneficial results. These stance are motivated by the widely accepted view that the distinctive business environment of construction makes the assumption that marketing approaches used in other commercial settings will necessarily work in the industry inappropriate (Morgan, 1994). These views further underscore the need for specifically defined and tailored-made marketing approaches for the construction industry. This can be achieved with the help of appropriate construction framework that serves to guide the adoption and implementation of marketing in the operations of a construction business enterprise.

Marketing in the construction industry is a matured subject that begun about five decades ago in the USA. In the history of construction marketing, Huff (1984) identified the Supreme Court's notable antitrust rulings between 1975 and 1978 that legitimized competition and induced competitive behavior among professionals as a first milestone. Peck (1994) and Sturts and Griffis (2005) noted that before these rulings, many professional ethics committees fought against deviations from minimal marketing, which was limited to mainly the use of business logos and

“self-laudatory” statements. Huff (1984) noted again that the construction industry witnessed a record number of contractor bankruptcies in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s. A situation which according to the author were as a result of the drastic reduction in public sector funding of civil engineering projects caused by the Middle Eastern oil crisis and the increasing indebtedness of developing countries. It was therefore not surprising that some contractors began to review their marketing practices (Huff 1984), because situations such as these calls for marketing solutions by business enterprises in order to prosper financially and survive in the face of such unforgiving economic environment (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Today, clients have become more selective in choosing contractors who provided “client-centered” rather than “technical-centered” services (Arditi et al., 2008). Marketing has therefore become a tool for attracting clients who desired personalized service (Arditi et al. 2008).

Business survival and a desire for greater profitability, in the view of Arditi et al. (2008), appear to have given construction marketing its greatest impetus. The construction industry is a “crowded” industry characterized by a high entry rate. Capital requirement for setting up construction business are mostly within the range that can be afforded by a greater number of Ghanaians and other investors. The Ministry of Water Resources, Works and Housing, (MWRWH) responsible for the housing infrastructure and construction throughout the country, classifies building contractors into four groupings: projects worth up to \$75,000 (D4K4); projects ranging from \$75,000-250,000 (D3K4); projects worth \$250,000-500,000 (D2K2); and projects over \$500,000 (D1K1) (Frimpong and Kwasi, 2013). As a result many construction businesses exist in Ghana. The Chartered Institute of Building in Ghana estimates that there are over 1,600 building contractors working in Ghana since October 2012 (Oxford Business Group 2014).

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that contractors are constantly involved in evaluating ways that will allow them to make better offers than those of their competitors. Contractors also want to explore less crowded areas of construction that may provide increased profits. Marketing therefore becomes imperative to achieve these goals (Arditi et al., 2008). Marketing has been identified by Friedman (1984) as an activity with a potential for increasing sales. This has made marketing imperative for the contractor who wants to achieve market differentiation (Arditi et al. 2008). Marketing is considered to be an investment for creating a competitive edge—an empowerment for competitive advantage (Arditi et al. 2008). Notwithstanding this, the application of marketing in the construction industry has not seen any marked improvement for many decades.

Notable among the reasons for this situation is the continuous reliance on general marketing models by the construction industry. Arditi et al. (2008) contends that mainstream marketing, which was mostly developed for the manufacturing industry, provides little help to the construction industry. The reason for this lies in the difficulty with which general marketing principles can be applied in the construction industry. Arditi and Davis (1988) and Peck (1994) highlighted the difficulties of applying traditional marketing techniques in the construction industry due to the peculiarities of the industry. Construction is capital intensive, weather, and location dependent, often involves one-time unique purchases, and is characterized by a long procurement process.

This according to Arditi et al. (2008) cannot be said of other industries which have simple procurement processes, rather construction procurement is complex, entails extensive planning, and involves a multidisciplinary team.

To overcome these difficulties Smyth (1999) proposes the application of a combination of existing marketing theories from industries, which share one or more characteristics with the construction industry. Winter and Preece (2000) also share the opinion that a combination of marketing theories would be appropriate for the industry. The authors recommend a combination of industrial and service marketing theories to construction. Although such frameworks exist, their utilization in the construction industry continues to remain an uphill struggle with little to no success.

For a framework to be effective and also to enhance its wide adoption, it needs to satisfy ‘expected’ and ‘attractive’, requirements. This paper begins by establishing the main requirements of a framework. Then, a review of well known construction marketing frameworks are undertaken with the view to examine their characteristics within the context of the ‘expected’ and the ‘attractive’ requirements of a framework.

2. REQUIREMENTS OF FRAMEWORK

A critical review of literature reveals that the term framework is often used interchangeably with other closely related terms such as model and methodology. There exists some confusion over the three terms (Delgado-Hernandez and Aspinwall, 2008), as they are used in literature. Table 1 gives some characteristic differences in the three terms, in an attempt to explicate the differences between the three terms.

Table 1: Characteristic differences between a model, methodology and framework

Term	Answers	Nature	Design
Model	‘What is’	Conceptual	Descriptive
Methodology	‘How to’	Methodical	Prescriptive
Framework	‘How to’ and ‘What is’	Conceptual	Descriptive

Source: Authors’ construct based on the work of Wong (2005)

From the Table 1, it is apparent that a model for marketing business would show the elements that should be considered to achieve successful marketing performance of a construction business enterprise. A framework, on the other hand would not only present such elements but in addition, it would also present ways on how to put such elements into practice to achieve successful marketing performance. With methodology, detailed steps of guidance will be given to show how to achieve successful marketing of construction business enterprises. To provide a complete picture and the overall structure for adoption and implementation of marketing, a framework would be the best option.

According to Tzortzopoulos et al. (2004), for a framework to be effective and widely adopted, it should satisfy a set of desirable and compulsory requirements. Corbella & Maturana, (2003)

divides the requirements of a framework into two categories as ‘expected’ and ‘attractive’. The ‘expected’ according Delgado-Hernandez and Aspinwall (2008), refers to those requisites that must be satisfied in order to ensure that the framework answers both ‘what is’ and ‘how to’ improve construction marketing performance of construction business.

A framework must also satisfy a set of ‘attractive’ requirements (Delgado-Hernandez and Aspinwall, 2008), in order for the framework to be effective and enhance wide adoption. These requirements can also be used as criteria for evaluation of frameworks (Delgado-Hernandez and Aspinwall, 2008). They provide guidance for the development of framework, the ultimate objective of which is to produce a tool that could be applied in construction businesses to improve the marketing performance, to enhance financial prosperity and business survival.

The ‘attractive’, refers to features that may enhance the framework but are not essential. Table 2 gives the constituents of the ‘attractive’ requirements.

Table 2: Summary of attractive requirements of a framework for marketing of construction business enterprises

	Requirement	Conceptualization
1	Simplicity	User friendly to everyone involved in the construction business management.
2	Understandability	Easy to understand by all the participants in construction business management.
3	Systematic	Gives guidance on how to perform various activities in each of the stages of the construction marketing process and provides the necessary methods to support these activities.
4	Structure	Well structured that clearly presents both the elements that will help to incorporate marketing in the operations of a construction business enterprise and the links between the various operations.
5	Comprehensive	Applies to a great variety of businesses and supports the activities performed during the whole construction marketing process.
6	Practical	The relevant participants for management of construction business can use it in real situations without the need of experts.
7	Applicable	It is accepted and perceived as credible and valuable by its users in a wide variety of construction business enterprises.

Source: Authors’ construct based on the adopted and adapted works of Evbuomwan and Anumba (1998), Koskela (2000), Tzortzopoulos et al. (2004) and Yusof and Aspinwall (2000), Delgado-Hernandez and Aspinwall, (2008)

With the ‘expected’ requirements, the authors adopted and adapted the ideas of Dale and McQuarter (1998), Yusof and Aspinwall (2000), Dale (2003) and (Delgado-Hernandez and Aspinwall, 2008) – developed in the Total Quality Management arena, but suitably modified and altered to be fit for construction marketing. This was done to generate the following requirements. A framework for marketing construction business must:

(1) Be able to answer ‘What is marketing in construction?’ (i.e. present the elements that constitute construction marketing);

- (2) Display a general picture of the activities that could be applied to market a construction business enterprise, and
- (3) Determine the role of various marketing improvement methods within the whole construction marketing process (i.e. show how to improve marketing performance).

3. METHODOLOGY

A review of the existing models of construction marketing is undertaken with the objective to identify key characteristics that can be potential barriers to their utilization. The frameworks comprised of Macnamara (2002), Smyth (2000), Yisa et al. (1995) and Harris and McCaffer (2000). The basis for their choice was the fact that they have been cited by at least one construction marketing literature. It also appears that they are the only frameworks that are known, or maybe ever existed in construction marketing arena.

In all four frameworks were reviewed in line with 'expected' and 'attractive' requirements. The characteristics of the reviewed frameworks are examined in the context of the three 'expected' and the seven 'attractive' requirements of framework, that have been suitably modified for the purpose of construction marketing.

This was followed by a focus group discussion. The outcomes of the focus group discussion are shown in Table 3 and Table 4. This was done to examine the extent to which the existing construction marketing frameworks satisfy the two categories of requirements. For the sake of simplicity the extent to which the frameworks satisfy the requirements are rated with either 'good' or 'poor', where 'yes' indicates 'good' and 'no' indicates 'poor'

To overcome the limitations of focus group interviews, such as the "halo" effect (Zikmund, 1997, p.115) on attitudes towards the concept or the topic of discussion, four different focus group interviews were conducted. To ensure the quality of the information obtained from each of the focus group interviews, the participants were carefully selected based on the following criteria: i) experience managing construction business enterprise; and ii) being a full time construction business manager or director of marketing in construction business. Each participant had been involved in construction business in such capacity and has also being successful in it for at least three years.

Out of the four focus groups, one group had six participants; another group had seven participants and the remaining two groups had eight participants each. Each focus group session lasted for at least 60 minutes. Questions were asked to establish awareness of frameworks for construction businesses and the challenges with their utilization.

The process of analysing data obtained from the focus groups included several steps: i) listening to the recorded scripts at least three times; ii) transcribing the script recorded from the focus groups; iii) reading the transcriptions carefully; and iv) identifying the main themes from the focus groups. Those issues mentioned three times in two or more different groups were treated as the

themes of the focus group interviews. The findings of the focus group interviews were used to formulate Tables 3 and 4.

4. EXISTING CONSTRUCTION MARKETING FRAMEWORKS

Marketing, like any other management function within a business enterprise, requires a systematic approach in order to achieve the objectives of the organization (Fisher, 1989). This provided the basis for the examination of the following frameworks.

4.1 MACNAMARA (2002)

Macnamara (2002) provides a model that illustrates how the marketing function operates in engineering consultancies. The model is an integration of the ideas in the work of Fisher (1986), Scanlon (1988), Wilson *et al.* (1992), Pearce (1992), Preece and Barnard (1999), Smyth (2000) and Collard (2001). It therefore addresses any possible inherent weaknesses that might exist in any of the works used as the basis for his work.

What are remarkable in the model are the linkages it establishes between various activities involved in the marketing processes in the operations of a business enterprise. Unlike most of that existed prior to this model, Macnamara's (2002) model links the firm's marketing system, from the marketing analysis and planning to: implementation and monitoring, the business environment, company wide, in the market place, and nationally/globally.

The approach gives the model its unique characteristics which further indicate the improvements over the models that served the basis for its development (Figure 1). The model emphasize that a thorough understanding of the whole business environment is vital for the generation of appropriate and reliable information. The scrutiny of the information gathered and its assimilation to feed into the formulation phase a necessary next step towards achieving success in the marketing programme. This analysis includes the history, changes, trends, demands, constraints and key influencing factors with regard to external PEST factors, the construction market, the clients and competition, and the business itself (Fisher, 1986; Scanlon, 1988; Pearce, 1992; Pettinger, 1998; Cannon, 2001). A popular technique used to undertake this assessment is SWOT analysis as Wilson *et al.* (1992) advocates.

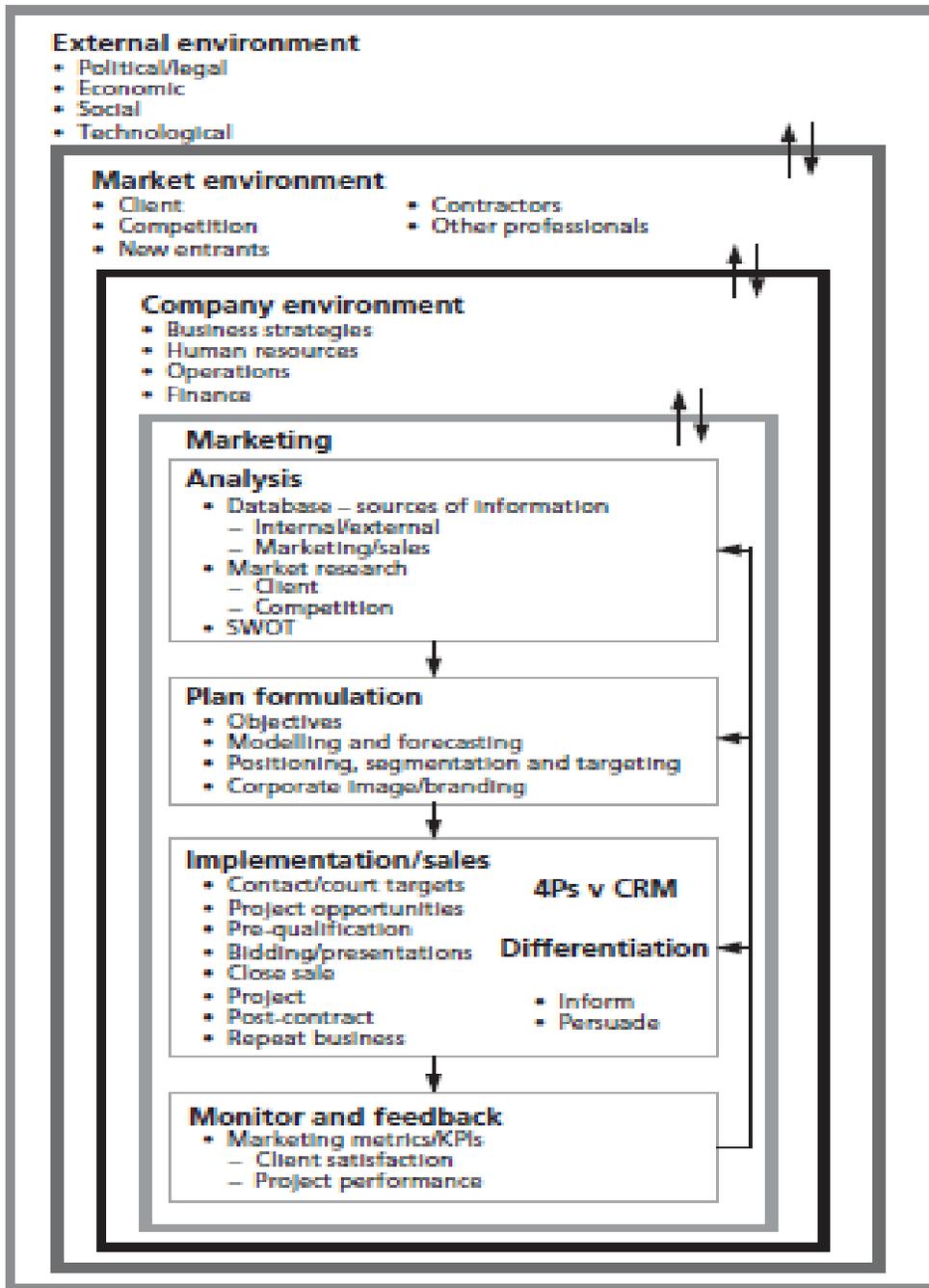


Figure 1: Marketing of an engineering consultancy

4.2 SMYTH (2000)

4.2.1 Typical key features of marketing positions

In starting with the business objectives, Smyth (2000) develops a model that identifies the six basic market positions as shown in Figure 1. It is suggested that consultants will tend towards positions E and F, where selling is through non-company networks, reputation is a 'key plank', the client wants the involvement of senior personnel, and selling is through technical and professional means, demonstrating the most appropriate solution.

The value orientation, from Practice to Corporate, is the primary driver of the organization; the emphasis is either on being ‘professional’, or on competent and effective performance, to achieve financial success. The model adopted for growth will depend on the market position; expansion in existing markets, market penetration, expansion in new markets, service differentiation, and expansion by takeover or merger. Research highlights that many organizations believe that service differentiation in existing markets and diversification into new markets is currently seen as the appropriate approach. This approach requires detailed marketing analysis of the market position, segmentation and client targeting; this means investment (ibid.).

Technology and methods		
	A Low risk	B Medium risk
Routinized	Low profit margins High turnover High market share Medium competition Separate sales function Medium potential for repeat business	Low profit margins High turnover High market share High competition Separate sales function Low potential for repeat business
	C Medium risk	D Medium-high risk
Analytical	Average profit margins Average turnover Average market share Low-medium competition ‘Door-opener’ sales function High potential for repeat business	Average profit margins Average turnover Average market share Medium competition ‘Door-opener’ sales function Medium-high potential for repeat business
	E Medium-high risk	F High risk
Innovative	Medium-high profit margins See-saw turnover Low market share Low or no competition No separate sales function Low potential for repeat business	High profit margins See-saw turnover Low market share Low or no competition No separate sales function Low-medium potential for repeat business
	Paternal/practice	Corporate
	Value orientation	

Figure 2: Typical key features of marketing positions

4.2.2 The idealized conception of marketing theory

The concept of the market mix and the 4Ps is outlined in Wilson *et al.*, and covered comprehensively by Pettinger (1998). The strategic approach of the market mix is explained and compared extensively with that of relationship marketing by Smyth (2000), who concludes that the latter is more appropriate for contracting and consultant services (Figure 3). The market mix is considered to be inappropriate as the *product* is an intangible service, influenced by market position, service quality and specific added value, *place* is irrelevant, *promotion* remains relatively under explored, leaving *price* as the only dominant variable, although this is a complicated issue, inextricably linked quality and service.

the delivery of promises and giving satisfaction, fostering of loyalty and hence repeat business (Smith, 2000).

4.2.3 The relationship marketing model

The relationship marketing model, which provides the, ‘linkage between perceived value and resultant relationship profitability’ (Smith, 2000, p. 193), is shown in Figure 4. Built on vision, expectations, authority and trust, relationship marketing is a more appropriate approach to sales, as the management process to secure competitive advantage. Pearce (1997) refers to Kotler’s suggested steps to establish a relationship marketing programme (1994). Key customers are identified as meriting relationship marketing, and a skilled Relationship Manager with a clear job description is then assigned. An overall manager is appointed to supervise the Relationship Managers and to prepare the long range and annual customer-relationship plans.



Figure 4: Pipeline of relationship marketing management

4.3 Harris and McCaffer (2001)

The work of Harris and McCaffer, (2001), emphasize on the need to undertake a thorough investigation of the firm itself and the business opportunity available as the basis for marketing in the construction industry. This investigation according to the authors involves two separate stages.

1. Formulation of business forecast
2. Assessing the strength and weaknesses of the company

The elements that constitute each of the stages and the outcomes are illustrated in the framework in figure 5.



Figure 5: The marketing process (Harris and McCaffer, 2001)

As shown in Figure 5, the first stage which involves a formulation of the business forecast requires certain information from market analysis and knowledge about market trends. The second stage is the company analysis. This provides information regarding the company's strength and weaknesses. The matching of the two exercises, according to Harris and McCaffer (2001) enables senior management to set the new policies. This process is described by the authors as the marketing process.

This is essential in constantly changing business environments such as construction. Survival of businesses becomes a matter of adaptation of firms' strength to suit market opportunities rather than looking for opportunities that suit the firms' capability that may be non-existent. This approach of adaptation requires continuous review of company policies. It is in this regard that the marketing process framework by Harris and McCaffer (2001) is found particularly useful.

4.4 YISA ET AL. (1996)

The model proposed by Yisa et al. (1996) aims at improving the effectiveness of the marketing function within the construction enterprises. The model represents a clear and practical approach for formulating, implementing and evaluating corporate marketing programmes. It provides a logical

means of addressing existing marketing problems by applying a strategic management process which focuses on integrating the marketing management and information systems aspects of a business to achieve organizational success

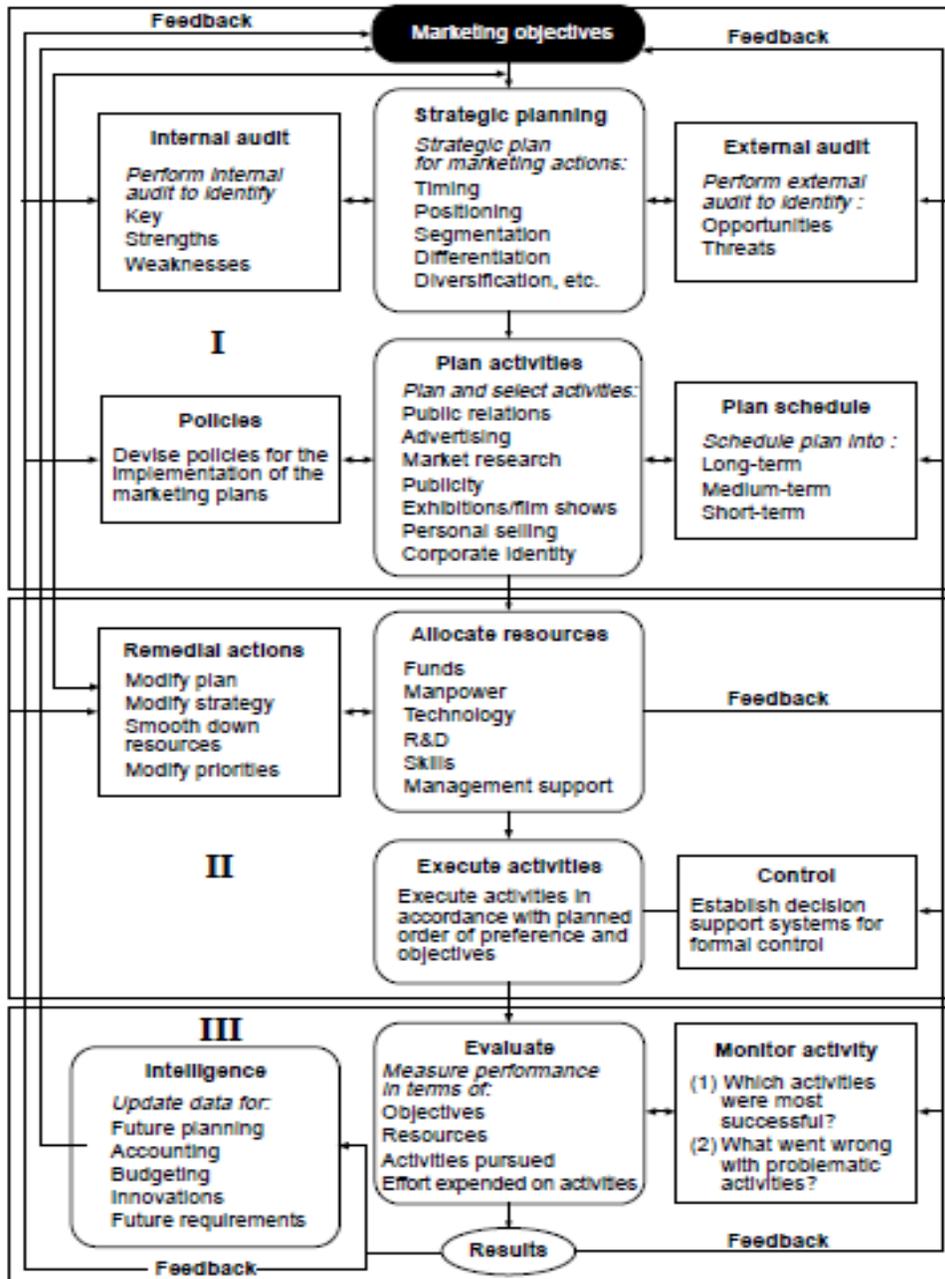


Figure 6: Systems framework for marketing of construction services

This process consists of three stages:

1. Planning,
2. Implementation (plan execution) and
3. Evaluation.

Planning and strategic formulation

Planning is the first stage in the framework which indicates the activities such as developing corporate marketing objectives, missions, SWOT analysis (i.e. identifying the organization's external opportunities and threats, determining internal strengths and weaknesses), establishing long, medium and short-term objectives and devising policies for implementing selected marketing programmes. The planning process according to Yisa et al. (1996) also includes generating alternative strategies and programmes. Identifying an organization's existing mission and objectives is the logical starting point of marketing management because a firm's present situation and conditions may preclude certain strategies and may even dictate a particular course of action.

In the view of Yisa et al. (1996), application of strategic planning achieved through the analysis of an organization's strengths and weakness, and matching its capabilities with threats and opportunities in the marketplace, helps to minimize the probability of conflict. Firms seeking to make a shift to a marketing-oriented culture must formulate a clear view of the firm's mission and the competence the firm wishes to develop in serving the market.

Marketing activities

Yisa et al. (1996) identified marketing activities relating to programmes aimed at enhancing the organization's achievement to include: advertising; public relations/publicity; publications in professional journals; market research; corporate identity; and different forms of strategic alliances. The authors further notes that the decision as to which of these activities is to be considered most appropriate depends on the managers' judgement, skill, the market segment and audience.

Whether a firm's promote its capability and experience through strategic alliances such as joint ventures or partnering ventures depends on the firm's understanding of who the client is, what other competitors are offering and what the firm wants to achieve in the short and long term. Marketing activities must be underpinned by strategy for the long -term objectives of the firm.

Implementation and control

Yisa et al. (1996) notes that successful implementation of marketing programmes hinges on managers' ability to motivate employees and also on interpersonal skills. The challenge is to stimulate managers and employees throughout the organization to work with pride and enthusiasm towards achieving objectives. Marketing programmes should be executed according to the planned order of preference and objectives.

The controlling function of management includes all those activities undertaken to ensure that the actual operation conforms to the planned operation. With effective control systems it is possible to identify immediately which areas need adjusting, as the implementation progresses by taking prompt remedial action when necessary (Yisa et al., 1996).

Evaluation and marketing intelligence

Yisa et al. (1996) argues that the concept behind the marketing performance evaluation framework is that there is an ideal or expected performance index, i.e. a level at which a firm's performance can be said to be satisfactory. Adequate and timely feedback is the cornerstone of effective evaluation of marketing programmes.

The cause of poor performance can be identified more quickly and actions to eliminate the problems can be devised for more effective actions. Faced with a constantly changing environment, each construction business unit needs to develop a marketing information system (MIS) to track trends and developments in the environment. These trends and developments can then be categorized into opportunities and threats, and an assessment made of the feasibility and action needed if the organization is to capitalize on the opportunities or minimize the impact of threats.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE FRAMEWORKS

4.1 The 'expected' requirement

As it has been indicated earlier, the 'expected', according Delgado-Hernandez and Aspinwall (2008), refers to those requisites that must be satisfied in order to ensure that the framework answers both 'what is' and 'how to' improve construction marketing performance of construction business. The following three criteria in the Table 3 was used to examine the presence of these criteria in the five well known construction marketing models discussed in the preceding sections.

Upon analysis a trend emerged to show that the entire five frameworks 'present the element that constitutes construction marketing'. That indication is good since it is the necessary first step towards an effective marketing framework for construction businesses. Again, only two of the models are able to 'Display a general picture of the activities' involved in construction marketing. The two frameworks are: Harris and McCaffer (2001) and Yisa et al. (1996). With regards to 'Show how to improve marketing performance' requirement, none of the frameworks was able to achieve that. Although the work of Yisa et al. (1996) admits that successful implementation of marketing programmes hinges on managers' ability to motivate employees and also on interpersonal skills, as well as managers' judgment, skill, the market segment and audience, the framework failed to provide a means of achieving that. No greater emphasis was placed on marketing education to construction business managers to improve their marketing skills towards implementing effective construction marketing programme.

Table 3: Expected requirements of framework

REQUIREMENT	FRAMEWORKS				
	A	B	C	D	E
Present the elements that constitute construction marketing	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

Display a general picture of the activities	no	no	yes	yes	no
Show how to improve marketing performance	no	no	no	no	no

LEGEND
A – Macnamara (2002) Marketing of an engineering consultancy
B - Symith (2000) Idealized conception of marketing theory
C – Harris and McCaffer (2001) The marketing process
D – Yisa er al. (1996) Systems framework for marketing of construction services
E – Symith (2000) Relationship marketing framework

Source: Authors’ construct based on focus group discussion

4.2 The ‘attractive’ requirement

In order for the framework to be effective and enhance wide adoption, it is expected to satisfy a set of ‘attractive’ requirements (Delgado-Hernandez and Aspinwall, 2008). The ‘attractive’ requirements, refers to features that may enhance the framework although they are not essential.

Table 4: Attractive requirements of framework

REQUIREMENT	FRAMEWORKS				
	A	B	C	D	E
SIMPLICITY	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
UNDERSTANDABLE	yes	no	yes	no	yes
SYSTEMATIC	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
STRUCTURED	no	no	yes	yes	no
COMPREHENSIVE	no	yes	no	yes	no
PRACTICAL	no	no	no	no	no
APPLICABLE	no	no	no	no	no

LEGEND
A – Macnamara (2002) Marketing of an engineering consultancy
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C – Harris and McCaffer (2001) The marketing process
D – Yisa er al. (1996) Systems framework for marketing of construction services
E – Symith (2000) Relationship marketing framework

Source: Authors construct based on focus group discussion

Again, from Table 4, none of the five frameworks satisfied the seven ‘attractive’ requirements of a framework. This explains the lack of awareness and the low utilization of construction marketing frameworks. This is due to the fact that the existing frameworks fail to meet the requirement that can enhance the adoption (Table 4).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The weaknesses identified in the existing construction marketing frameworks with regards to the ‘expected’ and the ‘attractive’ requirements of frameworks explains why such frameworks has not achieved much results in marketing of construction businesses. It further explains why the

construction industry is still groping with adoption and implementation of marketing as a management function or tool in the operations of construction business enterprises.

The need therefore exist for empirical studies that will yield frameworks that posses both expected and attractive requirement in order to enhance its effectiveness and encourage wide acceptance as well. Such development could mark the beginning of new dawn for marketing functions in the operations of a construction business enterprise.

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