

Oliver, J. (March 2006) Relationship Marketing: The Need for
Convergence in Conceptual Thinking and Validation in Practice.
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Abstract:

A generation has passed since the term relationship marketing was first defined, yet this concept remains illusive, fragmented, and dominated by isolated theoretical frameworks. As this paradigm moves uneasily into its second generation, it is now increasingly characterised by a polarization of opinion and would be better served by focusing on resolving two fundamental issues. Firstly, there needs to be some form of consensus and convergence in thinking regarding the actual nature of the paradigm in order to direct future research activities toward common ground and replication among its various conceptualisations. Secondly, this convergent position in the paradigm needs to be communicated to the practitioner more coherently in an attempt to move it from being an academic discipline and into the jurisdiction of the practitioner and implementable validity.

The purpose of this paper is to articulate a new, but more importantly, convergent conceptual framework for relationship marketing. It draws on a range of traditional and contemporary theory, and importantly, considers how this theoretical base was used in a practitioner environment when developing a relationship marketing strategy. The convergent framework presented in this paper comprises of three fundamental elements, from which past and future research can be (re)focused, developed and extended to produce a paradigm that can be subjected to more rigorous and extensive interrogation. This paper takes a strategic, reflective and organisational look at relationship marketing and contributes to existing knowledge by proposing three fundamental elements, (Organisational Customer Focus, Customer Management Focus and Customer Knowledge Focus) which if successfully integrated by organisations, will converge to produce an effective relationship marketing strategy.