

Barnes: Operations Management – an international perspective

Extra Discussion Questions

Chapter 1 - Operations management

Discussion questions:

1. Analyze and illustrate the role of customers as both a 'transforming' and a 'transformed' resource in a service production system by using different examples from the service firms.
2. Identify the different players / firms involved in the supply chain (network) of a newspaper that you read every week and discuss the role of each intermediary in the supply chain. How does each player affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the operations of the newsagents selling the newspapers?
3. Debate and discuss by using different examples the following statement: *"Front office operations are more concerned about effectiveness, while back office operations are more focused on effectiveness"*.

Do you agree and why?

Factors to take into account include how front office and back office operations differ in terms of:

- Competencies of personnel
- Standardisation or customisation
- Ease of introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT)
- The degree of labour intensity

Chapter 2 - Operations, strategy and operations strategy

Discussion questions:

1. Describe and discuss the approach that should be taken for developing the operation strategy of a firm. Which types of personnel should get involved and why?
2. It is usually stated that *'the structural decisions items of an operations strategy reflect the hardware of the firm, while the infrastructure decision areas represent the firm's software'*. Explain this statement and support your arguments by using different examples. Enhance your arguments by comparing and contrasting structural and infrastructural operations management decisions in terms of the time horizons and capital investments requirements.
3. Compare and contrast the operations strategy of Ritz Carlton hotel and Easyhotel.com in terms of their operations management objectives.

Chapter 3 - The internationalization processes: drivers, challenges and benefits

Discussion questions:

1. *'Selling a product in international markets is not easy'*. Comment on this statement by identifying the different factors that may influence the success of the internationalization of a firm. Use different real-world examples to demonstrate your points.
You can get some ideas by citing the following website
<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1206>
2. Does the Internet provide the same internationalization opportunities for all types of services, such as banking and hotel services? Analyze your arguments by identifying the Internet's impact on the internationalization of the service sector.
3. *'The stage theories of internationalization reflect a rationale of gradually reducing the risks of internationalization'*. Why is this statement formed, and do you agree with this? What are the risks that firms aim to mitigate when internationalizing their business and how the different internationalization stages help firms to minimize these risks?

Chapter 4 - International operations strategies

Discussion questions:

1. Identify and analyze the environmental and organizational factors that a firm needs to consider when deciding between the following modes of entry in new markets: direct export, joint venture, establishing a sales subsidiary, establishing a production facility.
2. Does entry into the Chinese market represent a market access strategy, a resource-seeking strategy or both? Support your arguments by using relevant examples of companies that have internationalized their business in China.
3. Cruise companies are one of the most internationalized companies. For example, they globally source material supplies and personnel, they have operations in several different countries (e.g. HRM in Switzerland, call centres in South East etc), and they register their boats in different countries such as Panama (the flag of convenience). Discuss what benefits cruise companies derive from such practices and how they achieve competitive advantages by internationalizing their operations.

Chapter 5 - Facilities

Discussion questions:

1. Identify the reasons and discuss the motivations of many European companies in relocating their operation production facilities in eastern European countries such as Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Estonia, etc. Can you identify any risks involved in relocating to Eastern Europe as well? How might such risks be mitigated? Use the following article as a help
http://www.economist.com/business/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8781427
2. When asked about the most important factors required to gain a competitive advantage in the hotel industry, J.W. Marriott replied: *"location, location, location"*. Discuss the role of location on service firms' performance and analyze the factors that one should consider when evaluating alternative locations for developing and building a hotel. Are these factors the same and of the equal importance when considering where to locate a call centre? Give reasons to support your answer.
3. Read the following paper and analyze the impact of a multinational firm's network on its performance and market value. How may the level of economic development in a country (e.g. advanced or developing economy) affect decisions regarding the network configuration of a firm? <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/paper.cfm?paperid=1256>

Chapter 6 - Capacity

Discussion questions:

1. Compare and contrast the different approaches for forecasting demand.
 - a. How accurately can a firm predict demand and what are the limitations of different forecasting methods? What are the factors that can affect the accuracy of demand forecasts?
 - b. Does the accuracy of demand forecasting depend on the type of service or product for which forecasts are made? For example, are forecasted demand levels of baby pampers as equally accurate as forecasted demand levels of luxury cars? Justify your answer by using different examples.
 - c. Debate whether the type of product or service, as well as the forces of the competitive environment on a firm, affect, and require, the use of different demand forecasting methods.
2. Compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of the quantitative (e.g. part time work) and qualitative (e.g. multi-skilling) methods of increasing labour capacity flexibility for both firms and

employees.

3. Imagine that you are the Chief Executive Officer of Starbucks. What environmental and organizational factors should you consider for deciding which of the three main strategies for increasing capacity you will follow for penetrating the south-east Asian market?

Chapter 7 - Process technology

Discussion questions:

1. Debate and examine how the type of product and service produced as well as the type of process (e.g. project, jobbing) affects the selection and use of types of layout process equipment by using different examples, e.g. standardised mass products follow production lines, projects use fixed position layout, while mass-customised products adopt cellular layout.
2. What factors influence customers' adoption, and use, of customer processing technologies? Analyse and discuss what firms need to do to support the use of self-service customer-processing technologies.
3. Identify and discuss the different operational factors and psychological effects on customers, that a bank has to consider when selecting a queue management systems to fit the following scenarios:
 - a. Customers take a number and wait their turn (average waiting time is provided to customers through a technology system)
 - b. One-snake queue system (single line multiple servers) is applied
 - c. Multiple queues (multiple lines multiple servers) are allowed
 - d. Different queues are created for different customers (e.g. individual customers, corporate clients, profitable customers etc.)

Chapter 8 - The supply network

Discussion questions:

1. Identify and discuss how ICT applications can help address and eliminate the bullwhip effect in supply chain co-ordination. Justify your arguments by providing different examples.
2. Identify and analyze the criteria upon which a firm should evaluate different outsourcing providers. Do all criteria have the same weight and importance? What factors determine the importance of each criterion?

3. Debate the impact of the strategic value and the criticality of a product, or service, to be outsourced on the type of outsourcing relationship (transactional versus relationship approach) that a firm should develop.
4. Discuss the different risks that global sourcing involves. What strategies and practices should a firm adopt for mitigating and eliminating such risks (e.g. single vs. multiple sourcing, service level agreements, contract flexibility etc.)?

Chapter 9 - Planning and control

Discussion questions:

1. Analyze the market, competitive and operational factors that a firm has to consider when deciding whether to respond to customer demand by produce-to-stock or produce-to-order strategies.
2. Given that material requirements planning (MRP) uses many estimated quantities (such as lead times, safety stocks, optimal order quantities) and is based on several assumptions (such as no rejections, accidents, quality problems and infinite capacity), debate on whether MRP can be applied in a dependent demand environment.
3. Discuss the different complexities, and the degree of complexity, involved in scheduling the following operations:
 - a. Staff (front office and back office) scheduling in an *a la carte* restaurant
 - b. Nurses and doctors scheduling in a hospital
 - c. Route and aircraft scheduling in a network airline (using a hub and spoke system)
 - d. A machine shop in a batch manufacturing company with 50 machines and 100 workers working in two shifts.

Chapter 10 - Quality

Discussion questions:

1. Debate the role of the GAP model in identifying and addressing the reasons / roots of quality problems? Support your answer by providing several examples
2. Analyze the different approaches of defining quality and then debate whether the concept of quality should be perceived differently for products and services.
3. Investigate the impact of culture on quality management. How do multinational companies aim to achieve and maintain quality standards in their international operations? Illustrate your answer by providing examples.

4. Use the different costs of quality in order to justify the evolution of quality ideas from quality inspection, quality control, quality assurance to TQM. What levels of quality costs are entailed in each quality management approach / stage?

Chapter 11 - Work organization

Discussion questions:

1. Examine how the type of operations and products/service produced affect the type of organisational structures of companies. Support your arguments by providing different examples from the real world.
2. Analyze how national and organisational cultures affect the implementation of TQM programmes that entail team working and staff empowerment.
3. Compare and contrast the JIT, lean manufacturing and TQM philosophy and management practices.
4. Using the analogy of a football team, identify and analyse the critical factors that a manager needs to consider when designing effective teams.

Chapter 12 - Human Resource Management

Discussion questions:

1. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of HCN and LCN strategies in terms of knowledge management, knowledge transfer and staff development in multinational companies. How can multinational companies achieve a balance of the different trade-offs?
2. Use different examples in order to illustrate and debate how the types of operations affect and influence the appropriateness of the approaches (behavioural approaches vs. scientific management) to work design.
3. Discuss and analyse why human resource management practices cannot be standardized across different countries by providing different examples.
4. Is employee empowerment relevant in jobs characterised by high levels of standardisation? Explain your answer.

Chapter 13 - New product development

Discussion questions:

1. Elaborate upon and discuss the following statement using different examples: *'Agents within the 'experience economy' place a greater emphasis on emotional rather than functional design factors'*
2. Identify and discuss how technological advances have accelerated the time-to-market and effectiveness of new product development processes by affecting products, processes and NPD activities.
3. Discuss the role of user-generated content and social intelligence enabled in Web 2.0 applications in NPD processes. How can firms can Web 2.0 technologies (e.g. blogs, consumer review websites, wikis, etc.) to supporting their NPD processes? What do the concepts of 'crowdsourcing' and 'crowdcasting' reflect?

Chapter 14 - Performance measurement

Discussion questions:

1. Comment on the following statement:
'By simply reflecting historical data, performance metrics do not help in future performance improvements. Whereas the Balanced Scorecard includes dimensions and metrics that are more forward-looking in performance improvement'.
2. Identify and discuss the learning processes and capabilities that benchmarking allows, in terms of performance improvement? What should a firm consider when selecting companies to be benchmarked with?
3. Analyze the difficulties in measuring and improving performance in services. What is the role of customers in good performance achievement?

Chapter 15 - Current trends and emerging issues

Discussion questions:

- Discuss the role and importance of environmental scanning in order to identify future trends and challenges. To what extent should managers engage with environmental scanning?
- Debate the importance of establishing organizational interfaces between operations, marketing and HRM departments to achieve success.
- Comment upon and debate the following statement:

'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a hot issue nowadays. However, as it has been argued by several economists, 'the business of business is to do business'. In other words, even if CSR is applied by several firms, their major motive is still good PR for money-making and not an authentic interest in the wider interests of society.'