



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

European Management Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/emj

Managing leaks: Shoplifting in US grocery retailing 1922–1969

Johan Hagberg^{a,*}, Hans Kjellberg^b, Franck Cochoy^c^a University of Gothenburg, Department of Business Administration, PO Box 610, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden^b Stockholm School of Economics, Department of Marketing and Strategy, PO Box 6501, 113 83 Stockholm, Sweden^c Université Toulouse Jean-Jaurès, 5 allées Antonio Machado, 31058 Toulouse Cedex, France

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 December 2016

Received in revised form

7 April 2017

Accepted 4 June 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Overflows

Managing

Leaks

Retailing

Grocery stores

History

Archaeology

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to further develop the general program of managing overflows by attending to the managing of leaks. Specifically, the paper explores efforts to manage the problem of shoplifting in US grocery retailing during the period 1922–1969. The study identifies three different yet interrelated ways of managing leaks: identifying, preventing, and caulking leaks. Each of these rests on a combination of skills and devices as well as on efforts to align with the other ways of managing leaks and routinize them as part of ordinary retail operations. By providing an analysis of leaks management the paper proposes a theoretical and empirical complement to the research program on managing overflows, which has previously primarily focused on overflows in the sense of excess, surplus and abundance.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Silently, unceasingly, hundreds of little leaks may be eating deeply into your earnings. Yet they are continually passing notice because your business as a whole shows a small profit. (Advertisement for The McCaskey Register Company in *Progressive Grocer* 1924, 02, 109)

Grocery retailing is a line of business where one can readily observe the general dependence of any business on various flows (for example flows of goods, customers, information, and money). It is also a line of business within which the effective management of such flows has been a central concern during the past century, intimately linked to an overall program of modernization and rationalization (e.g. Kjellberg, 2001; Alexander, 2008; Cochoy, 2016). It is perhaps less well known, although not surprising, that one central aspect of this modernization has been the careful identification and management of leaks, as suggested by the initial quote above. In this article, we use the case of US grocery retailing

in the 20th century, specifically the development during the period 1922–1969, to investigate the managing of such leaks. We focus on efforts to manage one particular type of leak closely linked to the transition from traditional counter service to self-service retailing, namely the problem of theft, pilferage, or shoplifting.

This choice of topic connects to and complements the recent interdisciplinary research program on managing overflows developed by Czarniawska & Löfgren (2012; 2013), which has so far primarily focused on overflows in the sense of excess, surplus and abundance. In short, situations in which the presence of overflows implies that there is too much of something. A wide variety of empirical examples of this has been explored, including overflows of patients (Norén, 2013), personal belongings (Brembeck, 2013; Ekström, 2013), news (Czarniawska, 2012), noise (Willim, 2013), and archival material (Fellman & Propp, 2013). In addition, extant studies have elaborated on the general notion of flow and directed attention to specific types of flows such as interflows (Kunda, 2012), underflows (Raviola, 2013), inflows, throughflows and outflows (Brembeck, 2013). Examples of such more specific types of flows are easily identifiable in retail settings, e.g. overflows of visitors in connection to opening both physical and online stores (Fredriksson, 1997; Hagberg, 2008); periods of rationing giving rise to underflows of goods (Witkowski, 1998); recessions leading to underflows of customers (Elvins, 2010); flows of goods, customers and

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: johan.hagberg@gu.se (J. Hagberg), hans.kjellberg@hhs.se (H. Kjellberg), cochoy@univ-tlse2.fr (F. Cochoy).

employees being coordinated in everyday retail operations to create interflow and avoid causing either underflow or overflow in any one of them (Cochoy, 2010); etc.

A central aspect of Callon's (1998) conceptualization of framing and overflowing is the view of overflows as something caused by the very act of framing. More specifically: "the potential sources of overflow are to be found in precisely those elements that give [the frame] its solidity" (Callon, 1998, 255). Due to their relations to outside entities, these elements become conduits for overflows. This includes instances when something 'floods' a frame as well as instances when something leaks out of it (Cochoy, 2013). In this paper, we propose to complement extant studies of managing overflow in situations of excess, which primarily address the former type of overflow, with the study of managing leaks, which addresses the latter.

To further elaborate on this, we can distinguish between two slightly different takes on managing overflows: one related to Callon (1998) and one represented by the managing overflow program (Czarniawska & Löfgren, 2012; 2013). It should be stressed at this point that the managing overflow program acknowledges a close affinity to Callon's notion of framing and overflowing (Löfgren & Czarniawska, 2013). Thus, we see no opposition in principle between the two takes, but rather a difference in emphasis and interest.

By stressing that any entity used to frame a situation constitutes a potential conduit for overflowing, and by linking such effects to the notion of economic externalities, Callon (1998) emphasises overflows as side effects of framing. Managing such overflows becomes a concern for those affected by them, such as agents who are external to, yet affected by, an economic transaction. Here, Callon emphasises the costly metrological investments necessary to make overflows measurable and hence possible to incorporate in the frame. While this potentially implicates agents within a given frame depending on the character of the overflow, the main thrust of Callon's argument is on how framing can be achieved in the first place. This directs attention to what he refers to as 'hot situations', i.e. situations where there is no stable knowledge base concerning sources and targets of flows, their effects, or how to measure them.

In contrast, the managing overflow program has primarily explored how agents acting within relatively stable frames, such as health care systems, news agencies, households etc., manage overflows in the sense of excess flooding such frames. This has produced detailed accounts of the ordinary and everyday managing of overflows, both in the sense of coping with and seeking to control them (Löfgren & Czarniawska, 2013). The studies have identified a large number of devices and skills used to manage such overflows as well as various hybrid combinations of individual skills and technical objects (Czarniawska & Löfgren, 2012; 2013). Further, the studies have emphasised the importance of routinization through which "people integrate and absorb new tasks, skills, objects, and ideas into the everyday" (Löfgren, 2013, 109).

Our approach combines elements from both of these in exploring how leaks are managed as part of everyday operations within a frame. Our overall purpose is thus to contribute to the general program of managing overflows with a study of leak management. More specifically, we explore the efforts to manage leaks due to shoplifting in US grocery retailing during the period 1922–1969. Our study identifies three different yet interrelated ways of managing leaks: *identifying*, *preventing*, and *caulking* leaks. Each of these rests on a combination of skills and devices as well as on efforts to align with the other ways of managing leaks and routinize them as part of ordinary retail store operations.

Three sections follow this introduction. In section 2 we describe how we conducted our archival study of the trade magazine *Progressive Grocer* and how we have made use of the resulting

empirical material. In section 3 we present and discuss our empirical findings concerning the three processes of leak managing. Finally, section 4 discusses how these findings relate and contribute to previous studies of managing overflow, specifically highlighting the dynamic of leak managing as part of the overall logic of framing and overflowing.

2. Material and methods

As argued above, grocery retailing has several characteristics that make it a suitable site for exploring issues related to managing flows in general. More specifically, the development in US grocery retailing during the period 1922–1969, which covers the transition from traditional counter-service to the modern supermarket, offers a rich setting for exploring the type of flow that we refer to as leaks. The quite dramatic changes in store format and management techniques introduced during this period raised fears, hopes and concerns among grocery retailers, some enthusiastically embracing the new ideas, others sceptically refusing them. Throughout the period, the leaks caused by shoplifting in the new self-service environment were put forward as a recurrent and increasingly serious problem. These circumstances, i.e. an open-ended and openly questioned development, typically offer good conditions for retrospective analysis (Latour, 1987). Moreover, the general character of many of the issues related to the handling of leaks suggests that the case could offer relevant insights for managing other types of situations.

In order to handle the possible overflows that often occur when it comes to business archives and more contemporary periods (Fellman & Propp, 2013) we have limited ourselves to one particular archive, that of the US retail trade magazine *Progressive Grocer*. As part of a larger project on the development and use of market devices in the history of US grocery retailing, we collectively browsed the entire backlog of the magazine from its first issue, January 1922, to February 2016. The material was collected during a series of sessions at the Gothenburg University Library from November 2015 to March 2016, at the US Library of Congress in June 2015, and at the New York Public Library in January and March–April 2016. Every page of the magazine has been browsed and those pages considered relevant for the overall project were photographed and saved in a database for further categorization and analysis by the three researchers. This procedure resulted in a database consisting of some 14,000 magazine pages. The collected pages contain editorials, interviews and articles, as well as advertisements from equipment manufacturers, service providers and producers of consumer goods. They further contain both text and images related to the topics in question. The material used for this article is based on magazine pages categorized as containing information about leaks (theft, profit leaks, and so on). In total, our account below is based on 208 magazine pages from the period 1922–1969.

As described above our purpose is to explore efforts to manage leaks. However, the terms *leaks* and *manage/management* are also used in our source material, sometimes referring to something very similar to what we mean by these terms, and sometimes referring to something slightly different. When articles or advertisements refer to "leaks", this generally concerns "profit leaks", i.e. various ways in which a retail business (unnecessarily) loses money. The term is used quite broadly and sometimes articles are illustrated with a leaking faucet. As discussed above, we use the term *managing* in the broad sense of handling, including both attempts to cope with and control something. Here, our source material sometimes uses the term in a slightly different sense. *Progressive Grocer* is a magazine for independent grocery retailers and various managerial functions in grocery stores, e.g. store managers. So,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7423622>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7423622>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)