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A synthesis of contemporary market orientation perspectives

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Abstract *A great deal of attention has been devoted to the concept of market orientation in marketing academe and practice. Numerous perspectives have been proposed as researchers endeavor to conceptualize the market orientation construct and implement it in practice. Presents a conceptual framework that integrates five recently advanced perspectives on market orientation (Deshpande, Farley, and Webster; Kohli and Jaworski; Narver and Slater; Ruekert; Shapiro). The similarities and differences are reviewed and a synthesized conceptualization of market orientation is offered, followed by a discussion of market orientation as a managerial versus cultural phenomenon to achieving a competitive advantage.*

Introduction

The marketing concept and the related construct of market orientation have been important components of marketing academe and practice for several decades (e.g. Arndt, 1985; Barksdale and Darden, 1971; Day, 1992; Hise, 1965; Houston, 1986; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Kohli *et al.*, 1993; Lawton and Parasuraman, 1980; McNamara, 1972; Narver and Slater, 1990; Siguaw *et al.*, 1994; Siguaw *et al.*, 1998; Slater and Narver, 1994). Due to the fundamental importance attributed to these concepts, numerous research projects have attempted to define the constructs and explore their application and implementation in business.

Over the course of the years, the marketing concept evolved to reflect a philosophy of doing business that can be considered the central ingredient of a successful organization's culture (Baker *et al.*, 1994; Houston, 1986; Hunt and Morgan, 1995; Lusch and Laczniak, 1987; Peterson, 1989; Slater and Narver, 1995; Wong and Saunders, 1993). While much of the research on the marketing concept has developed in the USA, recently the importance of this concept has been addressed in other countries (Elliot 1990; Ennew *et al.*, 1993; Hooley *et al.*, 1990; Marinov *et al.*, 1993).

For example, with the break up of the Soviet Union and the collapse of central planning, Russian firms faced a dramatically different operating environment. Numerous barriers to the development of the marketing concept

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existed (Ennew *et al.*, 1993). The former structure of the Soviet industrial sector, with an emphasis on resource constraints, presented problems in shifting to an environment with demand constraints, thus posing barriers to the adoption of marketing (Ennew *et al.*, 1993).

Bulgaria was in a similar situation to that of Russia (Marinov *et al.* 1993). A study by Marinov *et al.* (1993) indicated that four clusters existed in the marketing environment. The total implementation of marketing was only one of the four. Bulgaria also experienced barriers to adopting the marketing concept including lack of skills to develop a heightened marketing approach, lack of understanding of what marketing entails, and limited financial resources (Ennew *et al.*, 1993).

Studies in the UK also have addressed the importance of the marketing concept (e.g. Greenly, 1995a; 1995b; Hooley *et al.*, 1990). Hooley *et al.* (1990) attempted to develop a typology of current approaches to marketing. They identified four distinct paths to marketing that most companies go through as they evolve toward a full market orientation. The question regarding the universal nature of the marketing concept was addressed more fully by Elliot (1990). The author concluded that developing and applying the marketing concept has the best chance of occurring in placid, benign environments, which characterized post-Second World War markets.

While the interest in the development of the marketing concept has persisted on a global level, more recently a great deal of attention has shifted to the implementation of the marketing concept (e.g. Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Kohli *et al.*, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990; Siguaw *et al.*, 1994; Slater and Narver, 1994). In this sense, market orientation became synonymous with how to implement the marketing concept (Deshpande *et al.*, 1993; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990).

Many of these market orientation studies have been conducted in single countries or cultures, such as Eastern European countries (Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia) (Cox *et al.*, 1998; Marinov *et al.*, 1993), developing economies (Gray *et al.*, 1998), the UK (Greenley, 1995a; 1995b), Nigeria (Mitchell, 1984), Scandinavia (Selnes *et al.*, 1996), Taiwan (Horng and Chen, 1998), Australia (Caruana *et al.*, 1999) and notably the USA (e.g. Jaworski and Kohli, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990). Far fewer investigations have been multicultural (Deshpande and Farley, 1998b; Deshpande *et al.*, 1993; Lado and Rivera, 1998; Norburn *et al.*, 1990).

In general, there appears to be a consensus from those countries focusing on market orientation in business indicating that market orientation is perceived as a philosophy that permeates the organization (Hooley *et al.*, 1990) and directly affects the firm's performance (Caruana *et al.*, 1999; Horng and Chen, 1998; Kwaku, 1997) regardless of culture. Thus, market orientation continues to hold a prominent place in the literature. The potential contribution of the construct, however, has largely been obscured by conceptualizations that have in the past made empirical testing problematic (e.g. Hise, 1965; Barksdale and Darden, 1971; Brownlie and Saren, 1992; McNamara, 1972; Lawton and

Parasuraman, 1980). More recently, there has been a lack of integrative (or common set of) elements of empirically tested models (e.g. Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Kohli *et al.*, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990; Siguaw *et al.*, 1994; Siguaw *et al.*, 1998; Slater and Narver, 1994) making insights on the specific role of market orientation rather limited.

With more recent attention being focused on market orientation, five different major attempts to conceptualize the construct have emerged out of the scattered research:

(1) the decision-making perspective;

(2) the market intelligence perspective;

(3) the culturally based behavioral perspective;

(4) the strategic perspective; and

(5) the customer perspective.

The objective of this paper is to assess the five perspectives of market orientation and to integrate them into a synthesized framework. Initially, the five perspectives are reviewed, followed by the development of a synthesized framework that integrates the thoughts from the five established market orientation perspectives. After that, we elaborate on market orientation in terms of its managerial versus cultural aspects. The paper concludes with a discussion of the proposed framework.

Contemporary conceptualizations of market orientation

While there has been some differentiation in the literature on the use of marketing orientation versus market orientation, initially the term marketing orientation was adopted to refer to the implementation of the marketing concept as defined by McCarthy and Perreault (1990). The traditional emphasis of marketing orientation was customer oriented, focusing on consumer needs and making profits by creating customer satisfaction (Kotler and Armstrong, 1994). Market orientation, on the other hand, is the more recently utilized term for instituting the marketing concept. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) stress the preference for this label suggesting that it removes the construct from the province of the marketing department and makes it the responsibility of all departments in the organization. Under this guise, a market-oriented approach is more likely to be accepted by non-marketing departments.

In general, the term market orientation implies an expanded focus, paying balanced attention to both customers and competitors by some researchers (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Kotler and Armstrong, 1994; Narver and Slater, 1990), yet still remaining predominantly customer oriented by others (Deshpande *et al.*, 1993; Ruekert, 1992; Shapiro, 1988). However, there is generally a consensus that market orientation reflects the need for an organization to be market oriented or market driven (Deng and Dart, 1994;

Hurley and Hult, 1998; Jaworski and Kohli, 1996; Slater and Narver, 1995; Wrenn, 1997). In this context, five recent perspectives have been advanced in the literature, each taking a different approach to the concept of market orientation:

(1) the decision-making perspective;

(2) the market intelligence perspective;

(3) the culturally based behavioral perspective;

(4) the strategic perspective; and

(5) the customer orientation perspective (see Table I for a summary of representative works in each area).

Perspective and year	Representative references
Decision-making process (1988)	Glazer (1991)
	Glazer and Weiss (1993)
	Shapiro (1988)
Market intelligence (1990)	Avlonitis and Gounaries (1997)
	Cadogan,and Diamantopoulos (1995)
	Cadogan *et al.* (1998)
	Hart and Diamantopoulos (1993)
	Hooley *et al.* (1990)
	Jaworski and Kohli (1993)
	Jaworski and Kohli (1996)
	Kohli and Jaworski (1990)
	Kohli *et al.* (1993)
	Maltz and Kohli (1996)
	Selnes *et al.* (1996)
Culturally based behaviors (1990)	Cadogan, and Diamantopoulos (1995)
	Han *et al.* (1998)
	Narver and Slater (1990)
	Narver and Slater (1998)
	Narver *et al.* (1998)
	Siguaw and Diamantopoulos (1995)
	Siguaw *et al.* (1994)
	Slater and Narver (1992)
	Slater and Narver (1994)
Strategic marketing focus (1992)	Day (1994)
	Day and Nedungadi (1994)
	Gatignon and Xuereb (1997)
	Morgan and Strong (1998)
	Moorman (1998)
	Ruekert (1992)
	Webster (1992)
Customer orientation (1993)	Deshpande and Farley (1998a)
	Deshpande and Farley (1998b)
	Deshpande *et al.* (1993)
	Siguaw *et al.* (1994)

Table I. Summary of the market orientation literature

The decision-making perspective

> It's far more than the cliché getting close to the customer . . . the term market oriented represents a set of processes touching all aspects of the company (Shapiro, 1988, p. 120).

One of the market orientation perspectives identified in the literature is the decision-making perspective proposed by Shapiro (1988). Shapiro (1988) conceptualizes market orientation as an organizational decision-making process. At the heart of this process is a strong commitment by management to share information interdepartmentally and practice open decision making between functional and divisional personnel.

Shapiro (1988) specifies three characteristics that make a company market driven:

(1) Information on all important buying influences permeates every corporate function (p. 120).

(2) Strategic and tactical decisions are made interfunctionally and interdivisionally (p. 121).

(3) Divisions and functions make well-coordinated decisions and execute them with a sense of commitment (p. 122).

The first characteristic reflecting a market orientation stresses the need for the company to understand its markets and customers and to allow this customer information to "permeate every corporate function". The information that is generated through various mechanisms such as market research reports, taped customer responses, industry sales analyses, and trade show visits by top executives is disseminated to every corporate function.

The second characteristic proposed by Shapiro (1988) suggests that a market-oriented company must possess the ability to make strategic and tactical decisions interfunctionally and interdivisionally in spite of potentially conflicting objectives that mirror differences in modes of operation. Functions and divisions must be willing to listen to each other and be encouraged to express their ideas honestly and openly. To make wise decisions, according to Shapiro (1988), functions and units must recognize their differences and be willing to utilize an open decision-making process.

The third characteristic stresses making well-coordinated decisions among the divisions and functions and executing them with a sense of commitment. By joint sharing of ideas and discussion of alternative solutions, the market-oriented company can leverage its strengths. Shapiro (1988) indicates that powerful internal connections make communication clear, coordination strong, and commitment high, while poor coordination can result in misapplication of resources and failure to seize market opportunities. Although these characteristics of market orientation strongly indicate a customer focus, Shapiro (1988) does indicate anecdotally that understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the competition is part of being a market-oriented organization as well.

The market intelligence perspective

> Market orientation is the organization-wide *generation* of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, *dissemination* of the intelligence across departments, and organization-wide *responsiveness* to it (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990, p. 6).

Kohli and Jaworski (1990) proposed their formal definition for market orientation based on three key elements:

(1) intelligence generation;

(2) intelligence dissemination; and

(3) responsiveness.

By focusing on specific marketing activities, Kohli and Jaworski (1990) facilitated the ease of operationalizing the marketing concept. Their string of research has been published widely since 1990 (e.g. Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; 1996; Kohli *et al.*, 1993; Maltz and Kohli, 1996; Selnes *et al.*, 1967).

The starting point of market orientation according to Kohli and Jaworski (1990) is market intelligence. They conceptualize market intelligence as a broader concept going beyond the verbalized needs and preferences of customers. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) state that market intelligence includes monitoring competitors' actions and their effect on customer preferences as well as analyzing the effect of other exogenous factors such as government regulation, technology and environmental forces. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) also indicate that effective market intelligence involves not just current needs but future ones. This suggests that organizations anticipate needs knowing that it can take years to develop products to fulfill those needs.

According to the definition proposed by Kohli and Jaworski (1990), the first key element in market orientation is the generation of market intelligence. This relies on formal and informal mechanisms such as customer surveys, meetings and discussions with customers and trade partners, analysis of sales reports, formal market research and so on. An important part of this element is that intelligence generation is not the exclusive responsibility of the marketing department (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Information that is relevant regarding customers and competitors is obtained by all functional departments in the company such as R&D, manufacturing, and finance. Mechanisms, therefore, should be in place to ensure that this information is disseminated effectively to all departments.

This leads to the second key element described by Kohli and Jaworski (1990), intelligence dissemination. Part of the organization's ability to adapt to market needs is how effectively it communicates and disseminates market intelligence among the functional areas. This dissemination of market intelligence is important because it provides a shared basis for concerted actions by the different departments (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990).

The third key element of a market orientation is responsiveness to market intelligence. The first two elements have no value if the organization is not able to respond to market intelligence and the market needs. According to Kohli and Jaworski (1990), all departments need to be responsive and this can take the form of selecting the appropriate target markets, designing, producing, promoting and distributing products that meet current and anticipated needs.

The culturally based behavioral perspective

> Market orientation is the organizational culture that most effectively and efficiently creates the necessary behaviors for the creation of superior value for buyers and, thus, continues superior performance for the business (Narver and Slater, 1990, p. 21).

Almost concurrently with Kohli and Jaworski (1990), Narver and Slater (1990) also proposed a conceptualization of market orientation that presented a different approach to the construct. Inherent in the Narver and Slater (1990) definition of market orientation is the behavioral component. Narver and Slater (1990) inferred that market orientation consists of three behavioral elements:

(1) customer orientation;

(2) competitor orientation; and

(3) interfunctional coordination.

Building on these three components of market orientation, Narver and Slater have published a number of studies since 1990 (e.g. Narver and Slater, 1998; Narver *et al.*, 1998; Slater, 1997; Slater and Narver, 1992; 1994; 1995).

According to Narver and Slater (1990), the customer orientation element requires a sufficient understanding of the customer in order to create products or services of superior value for them. This creation of value is accomplished by increasing benefits to the buyers or customers while decreasing their costs. To develop this level of understanding necessitates acquiring information about the customers or buyers and comprehending the nature of the economic and political constraints that face them. This helps to ensure that the company will be cognizant of the needs of its present and future buyers and can work to satisfy those needs.

The competitor orientation described by Narver and Slater (1990) means that the organization understands the strengths and weaknesses of its current and possible future competitors as well as their long-term capabilities and strategies. The competitor orientation parallels the customer orientation in information gathering and includes a thorough analysis of the competitors' technological capabilities in order to assess their ability to satisfy the same buyers.

The third behavioral component cited by Narver and Slater (1990) is interfunctional coordination which is the coordinated utilization of company resources in creating superior value for its customers. Thus, anyone in the organization can potentially create value for the buyer. This coordinated integration of business resources is closely linked to the customer and competitor orientation. It draws on the information generated and through the coordinated use of company resources, disseminates the information throughout the organization. If interfunctional coordination does not exist, then Narver and Slater (1990) suggest that this must be cultivated by stressing the advantages inherent to the different areas in cooperating closely with each other. To be effective, all departments must be sensitive to the needs of all the other departments in the organization.

The strategic focus perspective

> The level of market orientation in a business unit is the degree to which the business unit obtains and uses information from customers, develops a strategy which will meet customer needs, and implements that strategy by being responsive to customer needs and wants (Ruekert, 1992, p. 228).

Ruekert (1992) borrowed aspects from the definition of market orientation proposed by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) and focused on the business unit rather than the corporate or individual market as the unit of analysis. This follows some of Walker and Ruekert's earlier works on the topic (e.g. Walker and Ruekert, 1987).

Ruekert's (1992) strategic approach allows managers to collect and interpret information from the external environment in order to set goals and objectives and to allocate resources to programs in the business unit. According to Ruekert (1992), the most critical external environment in developing a market orientation is the customer. The second dimension of market orientation according to Ruekert (1992) is the development of a plan of action or a customer focused strategy. This dimension considers the degree to which the strategic planning process considers customer needs and wants and develops specific strategies to satisfy them (Ruekert, 1992). In the third dimension, the customer-oriented strategy is implemented and executed by organizational responsiveness to the needs and wants of the marketplace.

The customer orientation perspective

> Customer orientation is the set of beliefs that puts the customer's interest first, while not excluding those of all other stakeholders such as owners, managers, and employees, in order to develop a long-term profitable enterprise (Deshpande *et al.*, 1993, p. 27).

Deshpande *et al.* (1993) proposed a more divergent view of market orientation suggesting that it is synonymous with customer orientation. Since they argue that a competitor orientation can be almost antithetical to a customer orientation, Deshpande *et al.* (1993) exclude the competitor focus from the market orientation concept.

However, they acknowledge that an interfunctional coordination is consistent with a customer orientation and should be part of its meaning. Deshpande *et al.* (1993) view customer orientation as being part of the overall corporate culture whose values reinforce and perpetuate this focus. This view is similar to Slater and Narver (1995, p. 67) who define market orientation as:

> . . .the culture that:
>
> (1) places the highest priority on the profitable creation and maintenance of superior customer value considering the interests of stakeholders;
>
> (2) provides norms for behavior regarding the organizational development and responsiveness to market information.

Deshpande *et al.* have conducted a number of studies related to this topic (e.g. Deshpande and Farley, 1998a; 1998b; Deshpande and Webster, 1989; Webster, 1981; 1992).

A synthesized market orientation framework

A synthesized framework integrating the original five conceptualizations of market orientation is presented in Figure 1. While there are some inherent differences among the five models, there are several similarities that reflect a general agreement as to what constitutes the basic foundation of market orientation. There are four general areas of agreement in the five perspectives, including:

(1) an emphasis on customers;

(2) the importance of shared knowledge (information);

(3) interfunctional coordination of marketing activities and relationships; and

(4) being responsive to market activities by taking the appropriate action.

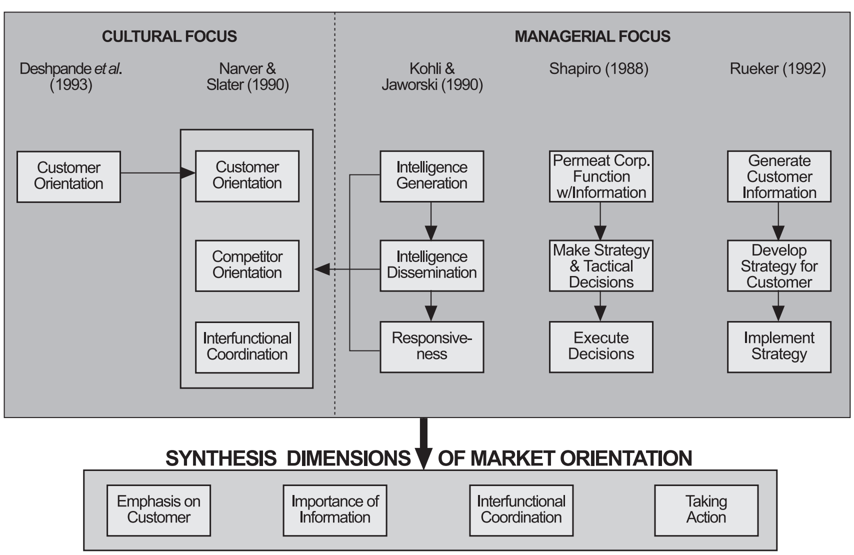

Figure 1.
A conceptual framework of market orientation perspectives

Emphasis on customers

At the heart of all these models of market orientation is the emphasis on the organization's customers. Since market orientation is the operationalization and implementation of the marketing concept, it makes sense that the fundamental premise of satisfying the needs and wants of a firm's customers should be inherent in any basic conceptualization of market orientation. Regardless of the perspective taken, the need for the company to understand its customers (Shapiro, 1988), meet their needs (Ruekert, 1992) now and in the future (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990), create value for them (Narver and Slater, 1990) and put their interests first (Deshpande *et al.*, 1993) is clearly put forth in the various definitions of market orientation.

Importance of information

A second unifying element that defines market orientation is the importance of information within the organization. This information has its focus, once again, on the customer. Shapiro (1988) indicates that a market-driven company is one which acquires and utilizes information on all the important influencing factors that affect the buyers. This sentiment is echoed by the other perspectives. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) refer to the need to generate information that they discuss within the broader framework of market intelligence. Narver and Slater (1990) indicate that in order to create value for the customer, a level of understanding is required which necessitates acquiring information on all the constraints that face them. Ruekert (1992) also clearly specifies that the degree to which a firm obtains and uses information from customers will determine the level of market orientation of that organization. Finally, in the conceptualization of market orientation by Deshpande *et al.* (1993), they discuss the idea that even though a focus on information about the needs of customers is important in a customer-oriented firm, it is inadequate without consideration of the values that pervade that organization and which help to define the customer focus.

Three of the five models indicate the need for the organization to generate and utilize information on competitors as well. There is general agreement in all the perspectives except the ones proposed by Deshpande *et al.* (1993) and Ruekert (1992) that the organization needs to understand the strengths and weaknesses of its competitors. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) specify that market intelligence also includes monitoring competitors' actions in order to determine their effect on consumers. Narver and Slater (1990) give equal weight to competitor orientation as they do to customer orientation in their conceptualization indicating that information gathering is equally important in both areas. Finally, Shapiro (1988) infers anecdotally that a market-oriented firm will also assess the competition and acquire information on them.

Interfunctional coordination

A third area of agreement in the models is the interfunctional coordination or dissemination of information in the organization. In the conceptualization by Shapiro (1988), the importance of this cooperative orientation is evident in all three of the characteristics he specifies that define a market-driven firm. Not only does he state that information should permeate the entire firm but that strategic and tactical decisions should be made and executed interfunctionally. The second key element in the definition of market orientation by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) specifically addresses intelligence dissemination interdepartmentally and the necessity of this step to ensure concerted action by the different departments. Narver and Slater (1990) single out interfunctional coordination as a key element in the conceptualization of market orientation and indicate that it is an equally important element as customer and competitor orientation. Ruekert (1992) also agrees with the need for interfunctional coordination in order to deliver customer value, and Deshpande *et al.* (1993) acknowledge that interfunctional coordination is consistent with a customer orientation and should be part of its meaning.

Taking action

The fourth area of agreement among four of the five models is the action taken by the firm. Whether it is phrased as executing well-coordinated decisions with a sense of commitment (Shapiro, 1988), corporate wide responsiveness to market intelligence (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990), utilizing company resources to deliver value to its customers (Narver and Slater, 1990), or implementing and executing corporate strategy by being responsive to the needs and wants of the marketplace (Ruekert, 1992), it is clear that implementation of a customer orientation is a critical ingredient in the definition of market orientation.

Discussion and implications

In Figure 1, the market intelligence, decision-making and strategic perspectives are presented as a linear process beginning with the generation or utilization of information, followed by its dissemination or use in strategic development and culminating in the action taken by the firm as a result of the prior two stages. The behavioral perspective is unique in the sense that each element in this conceptualization is equally important and is not structured as a linear flow. The market intelligence and the behavioral perspectives are linked further in that each step in the market intelligence perspective is incorporated at each stage of the behavioral perspective (Narver and Slater, 1990). In other words, at the customer orientation stage proposed by Narver and Slater (1990), market intelligence is generated, disseminated and responded to by the organization in order to create customer value. The same process occurs at the competitor orientation stage and the interfunctional coordination stage. The final model on customer perspective has its closest tie with the customer orientation stage of the behavioral perspective.

Managerial focus versus cultural focus

The five conceptualizations can be further categorized into one of two distinctive perspectives: a managerial versus a cultural focus. Shapiro (1988), Ruekert (1992), and Kohli and Jaworski (1990) exemplify a more managerial or leadership focus. Senior management's role is seen as fostering a market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990) and, indeed, was tantamount to its success (Shapiro, 1988). The very managerial processes such as recruiting, training, and compensation were assessed to determine the degree of market orientation in business units (Ruekert, 1992). Therefore, it appears that the managerial emphasis in implementing a market-oriented approach was more central in the conceptualizations of the market intelligence perspective, the decision making perspective, and the strategic perspective.

On the other hand, both Narver and Slater (1990) and Deshpande *et al.* (1993) make reference to the type of organizational culture that must exist in order to create superior value for the buyers and superior performance for the business. The importance of a market-oriented business culture is crucial to organizations (e.g. Day, 1990; 1992; 1994; Deshpande and Webster, 1989; Deshpandé *et al.*, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990; Workman *et al.*, 1998) and the importance of this cultural perspective as a foundation for market orientation is strongly supported (Deshpande *et al.*, 1993; Deshpande and Webster, 1989). This conceptualization appears to extend beyond the specific structures and processes that are practised in a market-oriented company and goes more to the heart of the concept, focusing on the values that exist within the corporation. Deshpande *et al.* (1993) determined empirically that those firms which have cultures that are relatively responsive (i.e. market oriented), outperform those that are more internally oriented or have more bureaucratic cultures.

The role of culture became even more prevalent as the concept of market orientation evolved into what has been called the learning organization (e.g. Hult, 1998; Hurley and Hult, 1998; Sinkula, 1994; Sinkula *et al.*, 1997; Slater and Narver, 1995). According to Slater and Narver (1995), creating a market orientation is only the beginning. A market-oriented culture can achieve maximum effectiveness only if it is complemented by a spirit of entrepreneurship and an appropriate organizational climate, i.e. providing incentives and processes to operationalize cultural values (Deshpande and Webster, 1989). Slater and Narver (1995) refined their earlier definition of market orientation to redefine it as:

> . . .the culture that:
>
> (1) places the highest priority on the profitable creation and maintenance of superior customer value while considering the interests of other key stakeholders; and
>
> (2) provides norms for behavior regarding the organizational development of and responsiveness to market information (p. 67).

The emphasis was on the behaviors encouraged by a market orientation that effects organizational learning (Slater and Narver, 1995).

Sinkula (1994) approached organizational learning from the market information processing perspective which encompassed the acquisition, distribution, interpretation, and storage of market information. According to Sinkula (1994), as organizations grow and age, they will have a tendency to make sense of their markets or learn. As part of this process, an organizational system of norms for behaving is developed. This is consistent with the refined definition of market orientation espoused by Slater and Narver (1995). These rules or strategies that form are typically found in a given cultural setting (Sackmann, 1991). Central to the organization's learning orientation is the fundamental value it places on learning. This determines how likely the organization will be to encourage a learning culture (Hult, 1998; Hult and Ferrell, 1997a; 1997b; Hult and Nichols, 1996; Sinkula *et al.*, 1997), provide leadership to support such a learning culture (Hult *et al.*, 1998), support innovativeness in the firm's culture (Han *et al.*, 1998; Hurley and Hult, 1998), and adopting an overall quality focus (Parkinson and Chambers, 1998).

Hurley and Hult (1998) proposed that models of market orientation should focus on innovation (implementation of new ideas, products or processes) rather than learning (development of knowledge and insights). Hurley and Hult (1998) continue by stating that market orientation and organizational learning are both separate antecedents of an innovative culture. Similarly, Deshpande *et al.* (1993) suggest that in order to better understand the functioning of customer orientation, the concept should be related to innovativeness of an organization's culture. Accordingly, organizations whose cultures emphasize innovation, when resources are available, will tend to implement more innovations and develop competitive advantage (Hurley and Hult, 1998).

Conclusion

This paper presented a framework that brought together five contemporary conceptualizations of market orientation and provided a synthesis of their components. While there are some differences between the models, clear similarities exist which cut across the various interpretations of market orientation. The emphasis of a synthesized market orientation construct is on meeting the needs and creating value for the customer. A second common element is the importance of information within the organization. This information is everything that can be generated about the customers and competitors to help in the firm's quest to be market oriented. Once this information is accessed through the concerted efforts of all the various functions within the company, the organization must then disseminate this knowledge to all the organization's strategic business units and departments. This interfunctional coordination is the third unifying principle in the models. Finally, four of the five perspectives on market orientation stress the need for appropriate action by the firm to implement the strategies required to be market oriented.

While these models provided a basic conceptualization of market orientation that could be operationalized, the construct was clearly not that simple to define and researchers began to look further into what constitutes a market orientation. Organizational learning, innovation, and market information processing have been addressed here which delve deeper into this construct and provide a richer view of what it means to be market oriented. Two of the original market orientation perspectives addressed the underlying corporate culture and its role in determining the degree of market orientation (i.e. Deshpande *et al.*, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990). This cultural dimension became the springboard for the learning organization, an expansion of market orientation which incorporated values, knowledge and behavior (Hult, 1998; Hurley and Hult, 1998; Sinkula, 1994; Slater and Narver, 1995). Under this umbrella, how the organization values learning, adapting and innovating leads to a more meaningful understanding of market orientation (Hurley and Hult, 1998). It is unlikely that the exploration of market orientation will stop here. With the significance of this construct to the performance of the organization and its potential to provide a competitive advantage (Day and Nedungadi, 1994), it is likely that the conceptualization of market orientation will continue to evolve.

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