

Market orientation: Identifying gaps between theory and practice

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which market orientation literature during the last 20 years, offers practitioners the tools and knowledge needed to manage the organizational change process in order to increase the degree of market orientation or to implement this philosophy within the organization. From this perspective, in the first stage of the study there were conducted over 30 in-depth interviews with marketing managers and top managers from companies operating in various industries. Based on these interviews was generated a set of questions, which reflects the views of practitioners about the tools and knowledge needed to develop market orientation within their own organizations. In the second stage of the study, using the classification and the hermeneutic spiral, we conducted an extensive analysis of the literature in the field about market orientation in the last 20 years, in order to see to what extent it provides solid answers to the questions of practitioners about the implementation of market orientation. The results of the study reveal that although market orientation was one of the most attractive research fields in the last 20 years at the international level, the implementation of market orientation issue has been insufficiently explored. Also, although many previous researches include a large number of answers to practitioners' questions, these responses vary greatly from one author to another, so we can conclude that market orientation literature is fragmented. Based on these findings, we proposed a number of perspectives from which researchers should develop a new integrative model for the implementation of market orientation, to assist the managers in the organizational change process. The limit of the study derives from the fact that, maybe relevant researches regarding various aspects of market orientation concept were not identified and included in our analysis, so our conclusions relying on the previous researches identified.

Key words: market orientation, implementation process, practitioners needs, gap

INTRODUCTION

Market orientation, which has its origins in the modern concept of marketing, was one of the most exciting and interesting research fields over the past 20 years. Throughout this period researchers have shown that companies that are successful have a high degree of market orientation. It has also been empirically demonstrated that firms that have successfully implemented market orientation improved organizational performance measured as sales volume, turnover, market share, profit, and the ability to create and implement new ideas, products and processes. Such organizations have improved their ability to attract and retain customers, taking into account that focus primarily on gathering information about current and future needs and desires of customers, producing products and services that meet these needs. Finally, it was demonstrated that these organizations have high capability to adjust them on the basis of continuous learning to respond to the changing market environment in which operates, being orientated from outside to inside. These effects of the implementation of market orientation have been demonstrated in different contexts - different types of organizations, across industries, different types of economies, explain the high interest of companies to become (more) market oriented. However, literature reveals that many companies have failed in the implementation process, this leads to critical views on this concept such as the fact that market orientation theory is idealistic and in practice no one company can be 100% market-oriented.

In 1988, it has been highlighted in an article published in Harvard Business Review by Shapiro, a first practitioner' question related to market orientation: "What the Hell Is Market orientated?". Thus, Shapiro shows how the President of the Controller Wolverine Company analyzes the need to become market oriented in a meeting with top management: "The situation can't get much more serious....As you all know, over the past couple of years everything has gone to hell in a hand basket. We're in deep trouble, with bought domestic and foreign competition preempting us at every turn. the only way to get out of this mess is for us to become customer driven or market orientated. I'm not even sure what that means, but I'm damn sure that we want to be there. I don't even know whether theres a difference between being market driven and customer orientated or customer driven and market orientated or whatever.

In 1990 appeared in the Journal of Marketing the first major works that came to offer a series of answers to the President of the Controller Wolverine Company. These works presented the results of the researches conducted by two separate teams of researchers: Narver and Slater, Kohli and Jarowski. In one of these works the concept of market orientation is used as the implement of marketing concept within the organization. According to Raaij (2001), in 1990 the concept of marketing was re-habilitated under a new name: market orientation.

The present market orientation literature is based on the research work of Narver and Slater (1990), Kohli and jarowski (1990), that has come to impose a new perspective on the marketing concept and to the formation during the last 20-year of a specialized literature that has developed around of this new perspective.

Given these effects of the adoption of market orientation, which have been demonstrated in various contexts - different types of companies, different industries, both in developed economies and developing economies, the interest of managers on how a company can become (more) market oriented has grown significantly in recent years.

However, the literature points out that to many times the companies have failed in the implementation process, this leading to the formulation of some critical views on this concept, such as that the market orientation theory is idealistic and in practice, no company can be 100% market orientated.

In the context described above, more than 20 years since the concept of market orientation was presented in marketing literature, we have formulated the research question that has generated this study: How can become a company (more) market oriented? The purpose of the study is to determine the extent to which the current specialized literature offers knowledge and tools for managers in order to guide them in the implementation of the market orientation within their organizations

Thus, the objectives envisaged in this study are: (1) to identify through managers' eyes the most important questions regarding the implementation process of the market orientation (2) to synthesize the most important findings of the empirical researches in the field about market orientation during last 20 years; (3) to determine to what extent the present market orientation literature offers clear answers to managers questions regarding to the implementation of market orientation concept within the organization; (4) to propose a series of market orientation research directions over which researchers should focus in the future in order to extend the conceptual nature of market orientation.

RESEARCH METHODS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to achieve the pursued objectives, within the first stage, we conducted over 30 in-depth interviews with Romanian top-managers from companies operating in different industries, thus the sample reflects a divers set of companies and industries. We included in the sample top-managers, considering them agents of change, having the competence of deciding the organizational change. The selection criterion was that managers selected generally new the concept of market orientation. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain practitioners' points of view about the implementation process of the market orientation. The interview guide contained four major issues: What is the signification of market orientation for you? Do you think your company should be more market orientated? Why do you think so? If tomorrow you will decide the implementation of market orientation within your organization, what you should know about this process? The interviews were conducted in an "as if" situation.

Based on the results of the interviews it was generated a set of questions reflecting manager's needs of knowledge and tools regarding the implementation of market orientation needed in order to guide them in this process: ***What really is market orientation? Should my company be (more) market orientated? Where do I start from? Where do I go to? How do I get there? Where did I get?***

Within second stage of the study, we identified and picked up over 80 articles published during 1990-2010, on market orientation topic. The texts were chosen from three main sources: (1.) the search on internet using key words and expressions; (2.) the search in catalogues of the most important libraries in Romania; (3.) the access to international specialized data bases.

The literature review was done in the accordance with the generated questions. In order to facilitate the literature analysis process, it was used the classification method. Thus, the texts were ranged according to the purpose of the research. The classes resulted, were: Class A: the definition, construct and measurement of market orientation; Class B: The identification of the antecedents and consequences of market orientation; Class C: The implementation of market orientation; Class C: Another purposes.

The analysis of the texts was done using hermeneutic spiral. Thus the analysis process was done in each class, starting with the most relevant works (established based on the citation degree), adding step by step other works presenting different points of view.

WHAT REALLY IS MARKET ORIENTATION?

During the last 20 years several perspectives of approaching market orientation were introduced by different researches: culture perspective (Narver and Slater, 1990), behavioral perspective (Kohli and Jarworski, 1990), strategic perspective (Rueckert, 1992), client orientated perspective (Deshpande, 1993, Day, 1995), strategic actions perspective (Lado, Olivares, and Riviea, 1998), value chain system perspective (Baker, 1999, Simpson, 2001; Grunert, 2002).

The various perspectives of approaching mentioned above points out the complex nature of market orientation phenomenon that is seen at the same time as: a business philosophy, an organizational culture, an organizational behavior, a source of competitive advantage, a competitive strategy, a set of managerial practices, a resource, or a capability.

So, the great number of different definitions of market orientation have resulted from the several perspectives of approaching proposed in the specialized literature, generated an unclear understanding of this concept. For instance, Dreher (1993) thinks that from the conceptual point of view, there is a certain ambiguity regarding the nature of market orientation phenomena. Gabel (1995) as well, thinks that the field of the concept is not clearly and corrected confined.

This debate regarding the nature of the market orientation concept comes out of the fact that it was differently approached and explored within the frame of different fields: marketing (Narver and Slater, 1990, Kohli and Jaworski, 1990), strategic management (Piercy, 1997), marketing management (Dovle and Wong, 1998), strategic management of human resources (Harris and Ogbonna, 1999), public services (Stokes, 2000).

In spite of the these multiple explorations, all approaches have started from the same premise – market orientation connects the organization to its operational environment, through gathering market information and disseminating these information inside the organization, along the functional departments, having as final purpose the superior value creation for the customers, and thus, improving the organizational performance.

SHOULD MY COMPANY BE (MORE) MARKET ORIENTATED?

The shifts in the present business environment, characterized by volatility, complexity and hiper-competition represent the key drivers of change. This is the main factor that should determine managers to analyze the need of change in order to implement market orientation. Companies comes on national markets with different evolutions, different needs and desires, which are changing more or less accelerated, on which operates more or less competitors. In this context, managers should analyze the need of the organizational change. Many managers fairly ask: “Why change something that goes well today?”

So, some managers can understand the necessity of change and to decide market orientation implementation only when the organization is in crisis because of the environment evolution or the evolution of the internal factors, both putting in danger the existence of the organization itself. On the contrary, some managers may analyze the necessity of change taking

into account a certain future evolution of both the desired image of the organization and the current and future targeted markets.

As literature suggests there are more positive consequences of market orientation implementation that should represent arguments in the evaluation process of the necessity of change through market orientation implementation.

The relation between market orientation and organizational performance was explored by many researchers, in different contexts and using various methodologies. They tried to understand the relation between market orientation and organizational performance, investigating a direct relation of causality in between. For instance, Woller (2004) identified 48 researchers which analyzed this relation and pointed out that 44 of these concluded that there is a positive relation between market orientation and organizational performance. Also, he emphasized that researchers empirically proved that market orientation has a positive impact over: the relation with customers, the services for the client, team spirit, the trust in the top management, work satisfaction, and the loyalty of the employees. Similarly, Lado, Olivares and Rivera (1998), identified 30 researches that analyzed the relation between market orientation and organizational performance, highlighting the fact that 25 of these agreed upon a positive relation. Still, researchers pointed out that there are some external factors that moderate the relation between market orientation and organizational performance. These external factors emphasized in the specialized literature are: market turbulence, competitiveness of the industry, technological turbulences (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990); competitive hostility (weak association) (Hart and Diamantopoulos, 1993); competitors' attack, the change of technology (Doyle and Wong (1996); competitive technology, market turbulence, supplier power with ROI (Kumar, 1998). The consequences over the client refers to the quality of the products or services, perceived by the clients, to clients' loyalty and customers' satisfaction regarding the products and/or services provided by the company (Kohli and Jaworski, 1993, 1996). So it was proofed that market orientated companies increase clients' satisfaction and loyalty because these are gathering market information about present and future clients' needs and offer products and/or services that correspond to these needs.

The literature on market orientation, also suggests the fact that one of the keys for understanding this phenomenon is the positive effects that it has on the innovation process (Atuanene-Gima, 1995, 1996; Xuereb, 1997; Han, 1998; Hurley and Hult, 1998). Slater and Nerver (1996) thought that innovation is the central competence for creating superior value that shapes the relation between market orientation and organizational performance. Going further, Nerver and Slater (1996) said that innovation and successful products is more likely to appear if the company is market orientated. Thus, there was empirically demonstrated that market orientation increases the company's ability to create and implement new ideas, products or processes (Hult and Ketchen, 2001) and the performance of the new products in terms of market share, turnover and profitability (Im and Workman, 2004).

Also managers should know that the development of market orientation within the organization has positive effects over the employees. Specialized literature points out that the implementation of market orientation intensifies the employees' commitment within the organization, increase team spirit and work satisfaction as well as the desire of keep working for the company. The employee's satisfaction allows the company to make a psychological differentiation that leads to higher degree of loyalty on the behalf of the client and higher profit (Lambin, 1993).

Thus, the implementation of market orientation implies sometimes major changes within the organization, costs, effort, and time and there is a certain probability of failure, it is essential that all consequences regarding market orientation, from top to bottom of the company, should be evaluated critically by the manager (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990) when the need of change is analyzed.

WHERE DO I START FROM?

The process of market orientation within the organization is a process of organizational change and in some cases can imply major transformations as in other cases only some minor changes. Thus, this process can be seen as a transition process of the organization from A Status to a B Status. That is way, the first step in the implementation process is the diagnosis of the current situation of the organization regarding market orientation.

In marketing literature have been proposed several scales that can be used by managers as diagnoses tools. For example, Wrenn (1997) in a comprehensive study identified 32 researches made during 1964-1996 about market orientation, concept of marketing or marketing orientation. In many of these works there were developed measurement scales. Tow of them imposed in the specialized literature being adopted and used by many other researchers and practitioners: MKTOR (Narver and Slater, 1990) and MARKOR (Jarowski, Kohli and Kumar, 1993).

In 1990, Narver and Slater presented MKTOR, a scale of measuring market orientation containing 15 items that reflected the three components of their construction: client orientation, competition orientation and interfunctional coordination.

In 1993, Kohli, Jaworski and Kumar introduced an alternative scale MARKOR containing 20 items reflecting the three components proposed: gathering information from the market, dissemination of the market information within the organization, and the response of the organization to market information. The third component is made of two distinct activities: the design of the response and the implementation of the response.

A consistent part of the works that followed during the years represented syntheses, extensions or rejections of the two scales of measurement. Many researchers analyzed these scales either separately or comparatively with different purposes: testing their validity and reliability; testing their degree of generalization; testing the correspondence between the definition, construction, and scale; analyzing the content of the scale. As a result, a series of criticisms regarding these scale emerged.

From the point of view of validity and reliability the two scales were criticized in several studies. Farrel and Oczkowski (1997, 1998) pointed out that although these scales have been accepted on a large scale, bought MKTOR and MARKOR were disappointing at a more accurate assessment of validity and reliability. The same point of view was sustained by Siguaw and Diamantopoulos (1994); Pelham (1993), Wilson (1996).

Using another approach Gauzente (1999) analyzed the two scales focusing on the correspondence between the definition of market orientation and scale. He came up with the conclusion that MARKOR had a larger content then the definition on which it was developed in comparison with MKTOR which was stronger connected to the definition given by its authors. From this point of view, Webster (1994) noticed that although Narver and Slate (1990) did not measure the culture, they used the concept of culture in order to interpret their results. Also, Gauzente (1999) stated that although the two researchers highlighted the culture nature of market

orientation phenomenon, the MKTOR scale did not take into account the cultural dimension of market orientation. On the other hand, Pelham (1993) stated that Jaworski, Kohli, and Kumar (1993) presented a narrow conceptualization of market orientation, emphasizing that understanding consumer's needs and the capacity of the organization to respond to these needs require more than the analysis of market information. He considered that even if these information are disseminated adequately within the organization this fact did not ensure the deep understanding of clients. That is why, he stated that a more suited administration of market orientation should include measurements regarding the understanding of the clients and how the organization generates superior value for them in contrast with the measurement of gathering and disseminating of market information.

Besides the critical analyze of the two scales, there have been made different attempts of extending or synthesizing them. For instance, Deshpande (1996) proposed a shorter version of the MARKOR scale containing 10 items. Farrell and Oczkowski (1997) concluded that the usage of a shorter version with 8 items led to obtaining acceptable results being suited to Narver and Slater (1990) construction and easier to handle. In case of MARKOR scale they suggest a version with 10 items keeping the balance between the three components of the construction, such a version being more practical. Lado, Olivares, and Rivera (1998) extended the definition and measurement of market orientation, testing empirically an alternative scale having 36 items reflecting the 9 component of their construction. They integrated in their model some elements that the previous models did not take into account: distributors' orientation and environment orientation.

In spite of these critical points of view, the two scales are a point of reference for bought researchers and practitioners.

WHERE DO I GO TO?

As literature review that was done emphasizes, managers can choose one of the scales measuring the degree of market orientation for diagnosing the current situation of the organization. During the diagnostic process, they can classify the items recorded low values representing the main directions of change in the implementation process.

The degree of market orientation depends on the presence or absence of some internal factors of the company, factors that have been labeled as antecedents of market orientation. Thus, Jaworski and Kohli (1993) identified several antecedents that can uphold market orientation: top management emphasis, the rewarding payment system, connection between departments and the decentralization of the decision-making process. They also identified a series of antecedents that can diminish market orientation of the organization: top management risk aversion and interdepartmental conflicts.

The importance of top management in attaining and maintaining a certain level of market orientation is sustained also by Kirca, Jayachandran and Bearden (2005); Harmon (2006). Management risk aversion is another factor that may diminish market orientation. Thus, researchers demonstrated empirically that the higher the risk aversion, the lower the degree of market orientation degree (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Van der Velden, 2004; Hafer and Gresham, 2008).

The connections between departments, the extent to which these are working together, the degree of the diffusion of knowledge between them play an important role in intensification

of market orientation. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) emphasized that the low interest of other departments ideas and the lack of interdepartmental connection diminish the company's capacity for a proper response.

Employees' commitment degree and team spirit are identified as factors that increase interdepartmental connection. The existence of interdepartmental conflicts suggests that departments are pursuing different goals. This fact will affect the response of the company to market information (Kirca, Jayachandran and Bearden, 2005).

Formalization and the centralization of the decision-making process diminish the speed of market information dissemination and thus and company' response (Matsuno and Ozsomer, 2002).

Value chain management, which is an important challenge for managers today, play an important role in attaining a certain degree of market orientation. Building, communicating and delivering of superior value for customers depend on the market orientation of the entire value chain system. Thus, the philosophy of partnerships along value chain system is very important for the success of the implementation of market orientation. So, the motivation of value chain members to adopt and support market orientation can be considered an antecedent of market orientation (Pandelica and Pandelica, 2009).

Considering the implementation of market orientation as an organizational change process, the development of the market orientation is an organizational transition from stage A to a stage B. According to the transition theory, a transition is a radical change. From this point of view, the implementation of market orientation, in some cases, can imply a radical change, meaning a transition, being the case of the companies that are not market orientated, or can imply only some minor change, mining an incremental change, being the case of companies that have a certain degree of market orientation.

Based on the antecedents of market orientation, we tried to syntheses the most important changes within the organization in the transition period (from Status A to Status B), emphasized in the table number 1.

<i>Past Status A</i>	<i>Success factors of the implementation of market orientation</i>	<i>Present Status B</i>
Made most of the components inside (going alone)	Top management emphasis.	The production of many components is outsourcing. It is focusing on the core components. Practices the partnership with members of the value chain system (going together).
The improvements were made beside own products (inside perspective)	The capacity of management to accomplish the change.	The improvements are made based on the feedback (the needs and desires of the consumers) and taking into account the competitor' products (an outside perspective).
Standardized marketing-mix		How many and what elements of the marketing-mix will be

<p>The management was performed through functional departments</p>	<p>The intensity of the resistance to change (the “immune system” of the company which will tend to keep it in the Status A).</p>	<p>standardized or adaptated? Targeted marketing-mix</p> <p>The organization is managed through inter-departmental teams’ task orientated.</p>
<p>Traditional organizational structure.</p>	<p>The commitment and implication of the employees within the change process.</p>	<p>The organizational structure is blunter and flexible.</p>
<p>The competitive advantage was due to the costs control.</p>		<p>The sustainable competitive advantage is obtained through superior customer’s value creation.</p>
<p>The development of new products was made slowly and carefully</p>	<p>The employees’ degree of motivation to accept the change.</p>	<p>There is an increasing effectiveness in realizing new products. New products are projects that involve inter-departmental task orientated teams. The new products are the results of thigh collaboration between C&D and Marketing</p>
<p>The innovation process was made from a technical (engineering prospective)</p>	<p>The degree to which the members of the value chain system understand, support and act according to this orientation</p>	<p>Innovation process is headed in a dual perspective: clients’ perspective and technical perspective. The members of the value chain system are implied in the innovation process.</p>
<p>The decision-making process is centralized.</p>		<p>Decision-making process is decentralized.</p>

Source: Authors’ point of view

HOW DO I GET THERE?

According to our study the implementation issue was approached only by few general studies. Also, the problem of implementation genearily was seen as a set of interventions recomanded to practicionars willing to develop market orientation. Any way, the interrventions propoused in the specialized literature varies on a grate extend from one researcher to another. For instance, if a manager will take into account the interventions propoused by Jaworski and Kohli (1990, 1993) in market orientation implementation, he will focus on: senior management stroger involvement, a better iterdepartamental connection and on the decrease of interdepartamental conflicts. On the other hand, if he choose Day’ (1995) recomandations, he

will focus on: reconfiguration of the processes, management's higher commitment, the improvement of targets. Such different interventions can be found in the market orientation literature (Lichtenthal and Wilson, 1992; Rueckert, 1992; Kotter, 1995).

Without underestimating the importance of this kind of interventions, our analysis points out that the problem of implementation is still insufficiently discussed about in specialized literature. The questions of managers regarding the implementation of market orientation are questions for which market orientation theory provides only partial and variable answers.

CONCLUSIONS

Definitely, market orientation has represented one of the most important and exciting fields of research in the last 20 years. Since 1990 an entire specialized literature has evolved around two important works published in *Journal of Marketing* by Narver and Slater, Kohli and Jaworski.

During the last 20 years researchers were mainly involved in defining, construction, and measuring market orientation. Within various different research works, various points of view about market orientation and the components elements of this concept were presented. Although there is a great number of different definitions all have a main common point – the client. We consider that this diversity of market orientation definitions and constructions is a consequence of various approaching perspectives and the researchers' increasing interest for this field as well as of their desire of seizing correctly the complexity of the phenomenon. Another concern of the researchers during this period was the identification of the stimulating and inhibiting factors for market orientation. Thus in many research works were identified and tested empirically various antecedents and consequences of market orientation. We have noticed that the relation between market orientation and organizational performance was investigated in various contexts – various types of companies, different fields of activities, bought in developed economies and developing economies. Many studies have emphasized that there is a strong positive relation between market orientation and organizational performance. Still, we have to underline that a small number of works did not identify such a relation.

Not least, during this period researchers were concerned with investigating the relation between market orientation and innovation. Thus, in many works it was showed that market orientation has a positive effect on innovation and that market orientation increase the capacity of the organization to implement new ideas, concepts, products, and processes. Still, we have to mention that a small number of works did not identify such a positive effect.

Even if researchers were interested in problem of implementation of market orientation during the last 20 years, this issue has not been enough explored. Our study, based on the extensive literature review, revealed that the problem of implementation generally was seen as a set of interventions that should increase market orientation degree.

From our point of view, the implementation of market orientation is a complex process of change, which in some cases involves radical changes across the organization as in other cases, involves only certain changes that affect certain elements of culture, behavior and strategy affecting only a limited area of organizational structure. From this perspective the implementation of market orientation is an organizational change process that ensures the organization's transition from Stage A to Stage B. In this process of change the "immune system"

of the organization will react, generating inertia, that is keeping the organization in Stage A, and this may ultimately lead to failure of the implementation process.

In conclusion the implementation of market orientation needs a holistic approach of the organization and should take into account organizational culture and behavior, strategy, organizational structure, processes and operations meaning the business model. On the other hand, the implementation process should be seen as a change process, meaning reshaping the business model.

On the other hand, we concluded that the present market orientation literature provides a series of partial answers to managers' questions and the answers vary on a grate extent. That is way we consider that in the future researchers should focus on the development of complete models that integrate knowledge and tools to guide them in the process of the implementation.

THE IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITS OF THE STUDY

The study had two main targets: the members of the academic community and the managers. It offers to all members of academic community a good support for a better understanding of market orientation concept. Also the study propouse a series of perspectivs for the development of models of market orientation implementation. At the same time, the study offers the managers a support for a better understanding of market orientation phenomen in order to analyze the necessity of implementation or the increase of the degree of market orientation.

The limit of the study drives from the fact that, it was conducted based on the researches identified and pickted up, so it is possible that important point of view regarding various aspects of market orientation were not identified and included in our analysis, our conclusions relying on the researches identified.

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study reprezents the preliminary step that was done in order to develop a research project proposel in order to participate in a national competition for obtaining funding. We intend in the future to involve in a complex research project with the purpose of developing a new model of market orientation implementation adopting an holistic approache in order to ghid managers in the implementation process.

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