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**SWP 21/87    MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS AND ITS  
RELATIONSHIP TO CUSTOMER CLOSENESS  
AND CORPORATE VALUES:  
AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Both academics and practitioners agree that the corporate culture will be reflected in the attitude of employees towards their role in the firm, and to its customers, suppliers and competitors. This clearly implies that the corporate culture is correlated with the application of the marketing concept as operationalised in the organization's marketing effectiveness. However, while there is conceptual support for this latter argument (Parasuraman and Deshpande 1984: Enis and Mills 1984), little empirical evidence exists. This paper focuses upon the major hypothesis that those companies who demonstrate a superior degree of marketing effectiveness will also have a distinguishing corporate culture or 'state of mind'. The results of the analysis support the hypothesis that those firms with a superior marketing effectiveness score would also demonstrate a superior closeness to customers and a strong corporate value system.

# **MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CUSTOMER CLOSENESS AND CORPORATE VALUES: AN EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT**

Mark Dunn, Sue Birley and David Norburn

For three decades marketing scholars have professed that the predominant business philosophy should be based upon a consumer orientation. Since its inception, this concept of a market orientation has become the very foundation and purpose for the study and practice of marketing. However, despite widespread support for the principles dictated by the concept, its pragmatic value has been constantly criticised and challenged. Two issues are generally debated - the alleged failure to emphasise societal concerns, and the shortcomings of operationalising the philosophy and implementing the strategies prescribed.

The environmental turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s which was reflected in neglected social services, political unrest, social activism, and a level of social entitlement funded by national deficit financing, ignited a societal movement which challenged marketers to emphasise humanistic concerns [Bell and Emory 1971; Dawson 1969, 1980; Feldman 1971; Kotler 1972]. Recently, however, this criticism has subsided and has given way to a further threat to the marketing concept's superiority, a challenge directly attacking the implementation of the concept [Sachs and Benson 1978; Bennet and Cooper 1979, 1980; Hayes and Abernathy 1980;

Riesz 1980]. These critics contend that US business has failed to respond to the contemporary competitive challenges facing them. The result has been a decline in American competitiveness, a decline which has been traced to an over-emphasis on market orientation. Indeed, Bennet and Cooper [1979] maintain that strict adherence to this orientation has created a lack of innovative spirit among US corporations. As a result, new product development has been replaced by an concentration upon the short-run strategies of modifying existing products, and upon other marketing mix variables. Conversely, they credit the success of the Japanese and the Europeans in American markets is credited to their delivering "better value" in their products, to a philosophy which is "based on the concept of product value, and providing superior products at competitive costs".

### **Implementing the Marketing Concept**

Whilst we believe that the criticisms outlined above are important, they nevertheless can be considered indicative of a greater problem facing the marketing concept - that of its implementation. Whilst the concept appears intuitively simple, developing the skills necessary to implement it presents a formidable managerial challenge. Indeed, many marketing leaders question the number of organisations who have successfully implemented the philosophy. Whereas McNamara [1972] noted that a movement towards its adoption and implementation was evident, five years later, Kotler's [1977] assessment was not encouraging. He concluded "of the Fortune 500 corporations, it seems to me

that only a handful really understand and practice sophisticated marketing". In two later and separate surveys conducted by Greyser [1980], and by Webster [1981], executives indicated that developing and encouraging a company-wide marketing orientation was a major challenge facing them in the future.

Despite these apparent problems, failure to implement the philosophy has not been attributed to an inherent weakness in the concept itself but rather to organisational barriers and constraints which inhibit the operationalisation of consumer oriented strategies [Barksdale and Darden 1971]. These structural constraints include both marketing and organisational functions in addition to their associated policies, programmes, and systems. Stampfl [1983] extends this direction to include the production technology utilised by many firms; the goal structure of the organisation; and an inadequate organisational structure.

Identification of the problems of implementing the marketing concept has therefore focussed upon what is essentially inanimate - structure, systems and strategy. Beyond this, however, lies a more fundamental and animate issue, that of the human dimension.

### **The Corporate State of Mind: The Human Constraint**

Relatively little is known about the people who make and implement marketing strategies. Regardless of the procedures, the systems, or the available information, it is people who make decisions and implement strategies. The human element represents a vital determinant of success or failure of a marketing

programme. Indeed, early advocates of the marketing concept insisted that marketing success depended largely on the human element as reflected in the organisation's "state of mind" [Felton 1959, 1965]. Felton proposed that this "state of mind" should begin with a customer orientation which filters through all levels in the organisation and that people, rather than strategies, are the ultimate determinants of success. Creating the proper environment is the key element in maximising productivity [Miller 1983]. Nevertheless, this pre-requisite to marketing success has received cursory attention only from marketing researchers [Bonoma 1984], despite the caveat issued by Buzzell, Gale and Sultan [1975] who, drawing from their PIMS database, warned that the characteristics and beliefs of top management were a major explanatory factor in determining financial variability.

The growing need to examine marketing management's human character parallels the growing interest in corporate culture, an interest stimulated by the poor performance of American industry in times of economic turbulence, and by the apparent success of the Japanese management style [Wilkins 1983]. Similar to the marketing concept, the concept of an identifiable corporate culture has received strong support from both academics and practitioners [Business Week 1980, 1983; Schwartz and Davis 1981; Peters and Waterman 1982; Tichy 1982; Uttal 1983; Fombrun 1983; Miller 1983; Parasuraman and Deshpande 1984; Pascale 1984; Wilkins 1984]. This concept represents the organisation's value systems and frame of reference, which in turn control behaviour

and form the organisational identity. It influences the actions of employees towards all 'stakeholders' in the firm - themselves, customers, suppliers and competitors [Business Week 1980].

The hypothesis that corporate culture is correlated with the implementation of the marketing concept such that a particular culture will produce marketing effective firms has already been suggested by both Parasuraman and Desphande [1984], and Enis and Mills [1984]. Moreover, empirical evidence to date [Business Week 1980a, 1980b, 1983; Peters and Waterman 1982; Uttal 1983] would support the need for further studies of these relationships.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Traditionally, marketing research has focussed upon strategic formulation rather than upon its implementation. As such, academic interest in the issues relating to organisational structures, behavioural aspects, and performance measurement appears to have been minimal [Parasuraman and Deshpande 1984], although Bonoma [1984] has recently emphasised that increased attention should be paid to the implementation of marketing strategies.

This study is therefore grounded in the investigation of potential barriers to implementation by considering the dimensions of the human component and their relationship to the operationalising of the marketing concept defined as the level of corporate marketing effectiveness.



The analysis concentrates primarily upon the views presented by Peters and Waterman [1982] of the common characteristics of America's "excellent" companies. Notwithstanding the criticisms from the academic world as to the study's methodological rigour, its acceptance by the corporate world has been exceptional: results have been used by many corporations as the basis for prescriptive plans for implementation of the strategic process.

Three characteristics identified by Peters and Waterman are relevant to marketing strategists and, thus, to this study.

1. The importance of "consumer closeness" - a service orientation, an innovative spirit, an obsession with quality, and a view of the organisation from the perspective of the customer.
2. The need for a distinct and identifiable set of corporate values - the organizational culture - represented by a belief in "being the best", and the importance of people.

Building upon these key issues, the major hypothesis of this study is that:

Those companies demonstrating superior marketing effectiveness will also be those companies which can be characterised as close to their customers, which show an identifiable set of corporate values.

## METHODOLOGY

**Data Collected:** A self-administered questionnaire was designed, and a pilot study conducted in the summer of 1984 on 54 firms in the geographic triangle of Northern Indiana, Southern Michigan, and Eastern Illinois. Three basic issues were addressed - marketing effectiveness, customer closeness (as defined by Peters and Waterman, 1982), and corporate culture. Results of this study are reported in Dunn, Norburn and Birley [1985]. The revised questionnaire, incorporating questions regarding market orientation, was then mailed to senior executives of 650 randomly selected manufacturing firms in the same geographic area. Useable replies were received from 177 firms, giving a response rate of 27%.

**Scales and Measurements:** Criteria as to the level of marketing effectiveness were measured using fifteen three point scales developed by Kotler [1977]. These are listed in Figure 1. The items were designed to audit marketing effectiveness in five essential areas - customer philosophy, integrated marketing organisation, marketing information, strategic orientation, and operational efficiency.

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Insert Figure 1 About Here

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Eight statements were constructed to measure customer closeness, and seven to highlight organizational or corporate values. These statements, shown in Figure 2, were drawn from the results of Peters and Waterman. In each case, respondents were asked to

indicate, on a five point and a seven point scale respectively, the extent to which these values existed within their organization.

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Insert Figure 2 About Here

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### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

To test their propriety the three scales of marketing effectiveness, customer closeness, and corporate values were each subjected to principal component analysis using an orthogonal rotation. Three significant factors emerged for marketing effectiveness, two for customer closeness, two for corporate values. Aggregate scores were then computed for each of the factors identified by summing the item responses, and a reliability coefficient calculated for each sub-scale. All sub-scales scored an acceptable reliability estimate.

**Marketing Effectiveness:** The three factors were identified explaining 50.5% of the total variance (See Table 1).

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Insert Table 1 About Here

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These factors do not fall into the five sub-scales defined by Kotler (See Figure 1). Indeed, two of the items - current organisation strategy (ME11), and reaction to on-the-spot changes

(ME15) - do not achieve sufficient factor loadings to be included in later analysis. The factors extracted are, however, reflective of dimensions of marketing effectiveness. As a result, we have changed Kotler's marketing effectiveness sub-groups in two respects - the first, **marketing efficiency**, reflects the extent to which the organisation understands its market and communicates this to the employees. The second encompasses the "customer philosophy" grouping used by Kotler, but also includes use of the marketing resource generally, and market research in particular. This has, therefore, been termed **marketing orientation**. The third includes only two factors, both within Kotler's "**marketing organisation**" category, and, therefore, this term has been retained.

**Customer Closeness:** Two factors emerged from this analysis, accounting for 45.7% of the total variance (See Table 2). The first encompasses statements which reflect the need to be constantly aware of feedback from customers: we term this **customer awareness**. The second, **customer service**, is concerned with improving the quality of the customer interface.

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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**Corporate Values:** Two factors in these scales had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, explaining 61.3% of the total variance (See table 3). The first four "beliefs" describe an individual orientation to quality and service throughout an organisation. We

therefore term this people and quality. The two scales of innovation and informality form a separate factor. It is worth noting, however, that an explicit belief in the importance of economic growth and profits fails to score as a significant factor.

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Insert Table 3 About Here

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**Regression Analysis:** Based upon the refinements of each scale described above, the composite scores provided the basis for further analysis. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine the inter-relationship between the three sets of scales (See Table 4).

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Insert Table 4 About Here

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It is clear from an examination of table 4 that there is substantial evidence that the subscales are inter-correlated. Thus, the hypothesis of this paper that those firms which demonstrate high levels of marketing effectiveness, as defined by the three factors identified by this research, are also those which can be characterised as close to customers, and which show an identifiable set of corporate values, is supported.

Following from the analysis above, the question remains as to which of the Peters and Waterman factors listed are the best

predictors of a marketing effective firm as defined by this research. Examining the matrix in table 4 for each of the three marketing effectiveness definitions, 'people and quality' is universally the most highly correlated. 'Informality and innovation' scores the second highest correlation coefficient for 'marketing efficiency' and for 'marketing organisation'. No other significant factor emerges for 'marketing orientation'.

The data was analysed further using stepwise multiple regression. Three analyses were conducted using the three marketing effectiveness sub-scales as the dependent variable, and the two subscales from customer closeness and corporate values respectively, as the independent variables (See Table 5).

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Insert Table 5 About Here

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Results from the analysis supported the inclusion of the subscale 'people and quality' as predictors of each of the three dependent variables. However, 'Informality and innovation' emerged as an additional significant predictor of 'marketing organisation' but not of 'marketing efficiency'.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to establish as to whether those companies demonstrating a superior marketing effectiveness would also be characterised as being close to their customers, possess an identifiable set of corporate values, and have an external focus.

Results from the analysis clearly support this association. Beyond this, however, the factor which emerges as the best predictor of Kotler's marketing effectiveness is essentially animate in all its aspects. It is a condition of pre-occupation with quality and service - an outward orientation demonstrating pride in the quality of output and in the paramount value of the individual to effect this. The emphasis of those academics upon the importance of the organisation's "state of mind" [Felton, 1959, 1965; Buzzell, Gale and Sultan 1975; Miller 1983] and upon an identifiable corporate culture [Peters and Waterman 1982; Tichy 1982; Uttal 1983; Fombrun 1983; Miller 1983; Parasuraman and Deshpande 1984; Pascale 1984; Wilkins 1984] is thus supported.

Just as Fiedler [1965] warned us to "engineer the job to fit the manager" rather than the other way round, concentration upon human values would appear just as apposite two decades later. To operationalise the Marketing Concept, it will pay for top management to foster and emphasise this focus in order to improve the likelihood of achieving marketing effectiveness.

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## FIGURE 1: MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS

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### **ME1: Customer Philosophy**

1. Does management recognise the importance of designing or providing products or services which serve the needs and wants of chosen markets?
2. Does management take into account suppliers, competitors, customers, and its operating environment in planning its organization?
3. Does management develop different strategies for different segments of the market?

### **ME2: Marketing Organization**

1. Is there marketing integration and control of major marketing functions [i.e. advertising, product development, marketing research, and personal selling]?
2. Do employees responsible for marketing activities work well with employees in other functional areas?
3. How well organised is the process for assessing new product or service opportunities?

### **ME3: Marketing Information**

1. When was the last systematic study of the market-place conducted?
2. How well does management know the sales potential and profitability of different market segments?
3. What effort is expended to measure the cost-effectiveness of different marketing expenditures?

### **ME4: Strategic Orientation**

1. What is the extent of formal marketing marketing planning?
2. What is the quality of the current organization strategy?
3. What is the extent of conmtingency planning?

### **ME5: Operational Efficiency**

1. How well is marketing thinking communicated and implemented down the line?
  2. Is management doing an effective job with the marketing resource?
  3. Does management react quickly and efficiently to on-the-spot marketing changes?
-

**FIGURE 2: CUSTOMER CLOSENESS, CORPORATE VALUES AND MARKET ORIENTATION**

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**Customer Closeness [CC]**

- CC1 - My company thinks of itself of providing a service rather than selling a product.
- CC2 - Employees of my company view the business through the eyes of their customers.
- CC3 - My company feels the key to attracting and holding customers is to keep improving product quality.
- CC4 - Employees of my company would take a quality complaint as a personal insult.
- CC5 - My company constantly seeks to improve its total offering defined in terms of more value for their customers.
- CC6 - An important objective of my company is to provide a reliable high value-added service.
- CC7 - My company encourages feedback from its customers.
- CC8 - My company feels that innovation and change come directly from the customer.

**Corporate Values [CV]**

- CV1 - A belief in being the "best".
- CV2 - A belief in the importance of the details of the execution, the nuts and bolts of doing the job well.
- CV3 - A belief in the importance of people as individuals.
- CV4 - A belief in superior quality and service.
- CV5 - A belief that most members of the organization should be innovators.
- CV6 - A belief in the importance of informality to enhance communication.
- CV7 - Explicit belief in and recognition of the importance of economic growth and profits.

**Market Orientation [MO]**

- MO1 - Customers will probably buy again, and even if they don't, there are many more customers.
  - MO2 - The organization concentrates its attention on the task of producing good products that are fairly priced.
  - MO3 - The main task of the organization is to satisfy the needs and wants of its customers.
  - MO4 - Customers will not normally buy enough on their own.
  - MO5 - The organization constantly searches for better products defined in terms of appeal and benefit to customers.
  - MO6 - The main task of the organization is to get sufficient sales from its customers.
-

TABLE 1

## Factor Structure of Marketing Effectiveness Items

<u>Items</u>	<u>FACTOR 1</u> <u>Marketing</u> <u>Efficiency</u>	<u>FACTOR 2</u> <u>Marketing</u> <u>Orientation</u>	<u>FACTOR 3</u> <u>Marketing</u> <u>Organisation</u>
ME1	-	0.66093	-
ME2	-	0.69973	-
ME3	-	0.57882	-
ME4	-	-	0.65237
ME5	-	-	0.81531
ME6	0.61672	-	-
ME7	-	0.62708	-
ME8	0.61315	-	-
ME9	0.56810	-	-
ME10	-	0.66865	-
ME11	-	-	-
ME12	0.65702	-	-
ME13	0.61315	-	-
ME14	0.67441	-	-
ME15	-	-	-
Reliability Estimates: Cronbach	0.7755	0.7290	0.5653

TABLE 2

## Factor Structure of Customer Closeness Items

<u>Items</u>	FACTOR 1 Customer		FACTOR 2 Customer
	Awareness	Service	
CC1	-		0.81352
CC2	-		0.60709
CC3	0.74041		-
CC4	-		-
CC5	0.65067		-
CC6	-		-
CC7	0.66062		-
CC8	0.59808		-
Reliability Estimates: Cronbach	0.6033		0.5753

TABLE 3  
Factor Structure of Corporate Value Items

<u>Items</u>	FACTOR 1 Concern for People <u>and Quality</u>	FACTOR 2 Informality and <u>Innovation</u>
CV1	0.82765	-
CV2	0.79392	-
CV3	0.58279	-
CV4	0.77836	-
CV5	-	0.76353
CV6	-	0.84697
CV7	-	-
Reliability Estimates: Cronbach	0.7869	0.6102

TABLE 4

## Correlation Coefficients Among Marketing Effectiveness Sub-Scales

	<u>Marketing Effectiveness</u>		
	Mktg. Effic.	Mktg. Orient.	Mktg. Organ.
Customer Awareness	.2211*	.0668	.2578**
Customer Service	.2168*	.1005	.2164*
People and Quality	.4745**	.3291**	.3935**
Informality & Innovation	.3121**	.1029	.3664**

\* Significant at 1% SL

\*\* Significant at 0.1% SL



TABLE 5  
Stepwise Regression Analysis

	<u>Dependent Variable</u>		
	<u>Marketing Efficiency</u>	<u>Marketing Orientation</u>	<u>Marketing Organisation</u>
<u>Standardised Regression Coefficients</u>			
Customer Awareness	-	-	-
Customer Service	-	-	-
People & Quality	0.4838	0.3276	0.3147
Informality & Innovation	-	-	0.2397
<u>Constant</u>	-1.5008	1.3397	-0.4024
<u>Adjusted r</u>	0.2290	0.1015	0.2202
<u>F-Value</u>	46.4544	18.2747	22.6042
<u>Significance</u>	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000