

Conducting field-based, discovery-oriented research: lessons from our market orientation research experience

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Abstract The purpose of this article is to surface lessons we learned in course of doing our article on market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski *Journal of Marketing*, 54, 1-18 1990). These lessons are intended to provide specific guidance for scholars – particularly PhD students and junior faculty – interested in developing new constructs and theories related to them. We organize the lessons into four sections that reflect the end-to-end research process. Specifically, the paper is organized around issues relating to: (a) choosing whether and what to study, (b) with whom to study it, (c) doing the research, and (d) crafting the findings. For each section, we identify one or more lessons or principles that we believe generalize to a broader research context. We conclude with a set of ideas for future research on market orientation, especially those that could benefit from field-based studies.

Keywords Market orientation · Field work

Since 1990, there have been well over 1000 articles on the topic of market orientation. This body of work has identified environmental, industry, management, organizational, and

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reward variables that drive an organization to be more market driven (Kirca et al. 2005). Moreover, there has been extensive research on the consequences – including business performance, organizational dynamics, human asset engagement, and customer impacts (Kirca et al. 2005). Collectively, this body of work has impacted academic research as well as the practice of market orientation within firms.

Market orientation is generally regarded as one of marketing's indigenous concepts versus one borrowed from another discipline. In the early 90's two different views of market orientation emerged – one generally focused on culture (Narver and Slater 1990) and the other focused on behavior (Kohli and Jaworski 1990). Ultimately, both were well received and heavily cited within and outside the discipline. The behavior-focused point of view on the concept was based on field and survey work with practitioners. The field-based interactions helped shape the meaning of the concept, its measurement, and identification of its antecedents and consequences.

The purpose of this article is to reflect on lessons from our research experience and provide specific guidance for scholars. Our insights are particularly relevant to scholars who are interested in field-based, discovery-oriented work in marketing management, and to reviewers charged with evaluating such work.¹ This is not to say that others cannot benefit from our insights, but since our work relied heavily on interactions with practitioners, several of our lessons learned are based on this context.

¹ There are several discovery-oriented approaches including observation studies, videography, participant-observation, and so on. Our insights are also relevant to these approaches; however, our discussion in this paper focuses primarily on interviews with managers.

In terms of structure, we organize the lessons learned into categories that reflect the end-to-end research process.² That is, this paper is organized around issues relating to: (a) choosing whether and what to study, (b) with whom to study it, (c) doing the research, and (d) crafting the findings. For each subsection, we identify one or more principles or lessons that we believe generalize to a broader research context. Importantly, the focus of this article is our first conceptual piece on market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski 1990); we do not discuss our subsequent articles on the topic.

Choosing whether and what to study

We started this research stream just after completing graduate school. At the time, we had a number of different research pathways we could have pursued including: (1) continuing with our doctoral dissertation research programs, (2) examining the intersection between our respective research activities, (3) looking for the “hot topics” of the day, (4) selecting a new-to-the-world concept, and/or (5) focusing on an emerging topic – of concern to both practice and the academy. In short, the decision to focus on customer or market orientation was not an obvious choice at the time.

Whether to study As we debated the choice of market orientation as a potential research topic, we knew there would be potential downsides – including diversifying (i.e., diluting) our research profiles, simply adding more research projects to our respective research pipelines, and heavy competition from well-known scholars. Ultimately, we decided to pursue the work on this new “emerging topic” after considerable discussion. At the time, the concept was labeled various terms – marketing concept, customer orientation, marketing orientation, and so on. There was a lack of clarity on the meaning and definition of the concept. So, we believed there was an opportunity to make a contribution.

Five key factors influenced our choice. First, the topic was of great interest to us. Second, the *Marketing Science Institute* identified “customer orientation” as a research priority and was looking to fund scholars in the area. No one was doing research on customer orientation at the time – so, one could be “first to market” in shaping the research stream. The MSI brand, funding, and access to their practitioner network was very appealing. Third, the MSI “stamp of approval” meant that the topic was of interest to practitioners and had the potential to be important. Notably, this practitioner voice would be important in helping define the concept – and refining our thinking. Fourth, the “customer concept” – while very

ambiguous at the time, is central to any discourse on the nature and scope of the discipline of marketing. Thus, we had a strong point of view that if one could figure out a meaning and definition, it had the potential to be well cited and deployed in practice. Fifth, MSI had invited us to a “kick-off” mini-conference on the topic – with several well-known scholars attending. After the conference, they reached out to us – and asked us to submit a proposal.

While these five factors would seem to suggest the choice was obvious, it was not. We knew we had to focus our research and publish in order to make tenure – and this new idea would take us in a new direction. Also, at least one well-respected scholar counseled us not to pursue the research. Largely, this was due to his perception that we would be developing research programs that had too many areas of study (which would slow down our respective research programs) rather than because of the topic of market orientation per se.

What to study Equally important, it was not exactly clear at the time how to “cut in” on the topic – was this going to be a conceptual piece, a research review/critique, or a piece based on field work? If it was going to be field-based, it would take up a significant amount of time, something we did not have much of.

In the end, we weighed market interest in conjunction with our interests and current research portfolios. We made the call – while factoring in the views of others. At the time we felt it was a “high risk but high-reward” research project. We had the good fortune of having had a good start – having published in the *Journal of Marketing* and the *Journal of Marketing Research* – Jaworski (1988), Jaworski and MacInnis (1989), Kohli (1985), Kohli (1989a, b), Park et al. (1986) – so, we could gamble a bit with this new research topic. Put differently, even if the market orientation research was a complete failure, we still had sufficient momentum in other areas to be able to get into decent shape to be considered for tenure at our respective schools. Or, at least so we thought at the time. Still, without MSI support – not simply funding, but also access, support, and brand association – we likely would not have pursued this research stream.

Lesson 1: *Research choice is a function of not just topic fit with personal interest and existing research program - but also market interest and support for the ideas.*

Lesson 2: *Develop a portfolio of research projects – one high-risk/high-return project balanced with others that have a lower risk/return profile.*

As a result of the MSI mini-conference, identification of customer orientation as research topic, and the centrality of the concept to the discipline, there were a number of research teams who were pursuing research in the area. It was not simply

² We believe the research process is quite general, though other types of field research may vary somewhat (e.g., some approaches may have a stronger intertwining of data collection and crafting of findings).

a two-team “race” of Narver/Slater and Kohli/Jaworski. Since very limited work was published at the time, it was not as though any team had a distinct advantage, access, or momentum. It seemed to be a fair – but highly competitive – “race.” Think about 5–6 teams at the starting blocks at the same time, and you get a feel for our head-set at the time. It was not simply that we needed to have a rock-solid, air-tight research design and set of ideas – but we needed to move quickly. We assumed at the time that “one winner” would emerge – and that winner would benefit immensely from being first to market with the research. That assumption turned out to be incorrect – the work of multiple teams (e.g., Day 1994; Deshpandé et al. 1993 and many others) “promoted” interest in the topic and gave it enormous visibility. Still, the competitive mind-set motivated us to work harder and faster.

Lesson 3a: *Competition can be a motivator and a catalyst for the research area.*

Lesson 3b: *Competition creates an expanded mind share for the topic in the marketplace of ideas.*

One has a number of research choices early in one’s career – focus on a new-to-world concept discovery, stay within a well-known research area, look to integrate multiple areas and so on. In our situation, focusing on what ultimately was labeled “market orientation” meant that we would not be discovering a new to the world concept. Rather we would focus on a “fuzzy concept” that had been identified – but was not precisely defined, understood, measured or theorized about. This created an opportunity for us to more clearly articulate the concept in a manner that was consistent with what we learned in the field work, and with early ideas of its meaning in the literature.

Lesson 4: *Focus on defining and fully articulating a concept that is gaining attention of both academics and practitioners. Aim to be seen as the originators of definitive work on the concept.*

MSI wanted to fund research on the nature of the concept itself. What was the meaning of the concept? What is the right scope, boundary, and definition? Researchers did have the option of expanding the focus to look at antecedents and consequences – but MSI was fundamentally concerned with the concept. Our approach was to focus sequentially on (a) defining the scope of the concept and (b) then looking more broadly to construct a conceptual model with drivers and consequences. Importantly, we knew we needed to get the “concept right” – and then the conceptual framework would follow.

Early on, we knew needed to both (a) look for a red thread that tied the entire concept together and (b) put boundaries on the concept. From a red-thread perspective, we quickly

realized we could not view the concept as encompassing notions such as customer needs, organizational dynamics, profit, and other factors that were thought to be part of the “marketing concept” at the time. To us, this list looked like a bunch of loosely related ideas – with no common theme. Second, as the research proceeded, it seemed to make more sense to look at “markets” not just customers, and to articulate the full set of relevant actors and stakeholders in a market. Our “solution” was simply to focus on the flow of market intelligence – its development, sharing, and use within the firm. We proposed that market intelligence referred to customers’ current and future needs and forces that influence them. In hindsight, we wonder if this was the best choice or whether we should have narrowed down the stakeholders to the two generally more dominant ones – customers and competitors. While the broader approach we took is technically correct and useful in practice, we wonder if the concept might have gained greater depth in subsequent research had it been more circumscribed.

More generally, there appear to be at least three criteria that are helpful in deciding on the breadth of a construct. First, the concept should be parsimonious. That is, all else equal, the concept can be articulated using one or a few (versus, say, five) components. Second, in case of multi-component concepts there should be a common theme or a red thread (e.g., “intelligence” in our definition of market orientation) that runs through the components. The 1980s definition of the marketing concept included three components: “profit,” “inter-functional coordination,” and “customer focus.” In our view – these three components do not have a red thread that pulls them together into a concept. Relatedly, the components should all work in unison, i.e., relate to other constructs in a similar way (direction, functional form). Third, the concept should have “good enough” explanatory power for other variables of interest. A simple litmus test in our case was whether our concept of market orientation will likely “explain” variance in business performance. If not, it would be time to go back to the drawing board.

Lesson 5: *Get the core concept right first. The antecedents, moderators, and consequences follow if the core concept is airtight.*

Lesson 6: *When delineating concepts be broad to capture richness but not so broad that it includes too much.*

With whom to do the research

One of the most important decisions a researcher can make is the choice of a co-author. In some cases, the co-authorship is somewhat predetermined by choice of dissertation chair or other relationships. In our case, we entered graduate school the same year and graduated the same summer. We took a

lion's share of courses together and spent social time together. So, we were very good friends – with a common interest in practitioner issues related to marketing strategy.

Given our common background and interests, it perhaps was not surprising that we decided to co-author some research after we graduated and took up our first jobs at two different universities hundreds of miles away. However, to be clear, the friendship, work ethic, and complementarity of skills were important – but probably not the most important factors. Instead, we would point to four other conditions – similar commitment levels to this particular project, similar values, alignment on meta-goal, and fun.

The literature on strategic alliances points to a few key variables that shape the success of alliances. One of these variables is related to the alignment with respect to the commitment to the relationship. Some firms enter into a relationship thinking it is short-term while their partners may think it is a long-term strategic partnership. In this case, problems are likely to emerge since they have different levels of commitment to the partnership. We both were deeply committed to this project. While we had other projects ongoing, we both took this project very seriously. We were in touch over the phone almost daily – throughout the entire research cycle. This included both weekdays and weekends.

Second, we had very similar values. A dominant one related to finding the best solution to various issues that often arise during the research process. There was not a political undercurrent, power structure, or “top dog” mentality. All we wanted was to get every part of the research “right.” While we were respectful of each other's views, we debated solutions endlessly. We looked at the issues from many different vantage points – often recycling earlier debates. In a sense, we both owned the project – and made joint decisions throughout the research process.

Third, we had the same meta-goal. Namely to publish the work in either JM or JMR. We had a vision for the paper – and the paper needed to be published in a top outlet – for us to have a significant impact on the field. We never discussed another option – we simply were on the same page from beginning.

Finally, we wanted to have fun. There were days where we would be on the phone for hours – and never talk about the research. Today this still happens – we check in on families, other projects, challenging issues at work, and other topics. We truly enjoy each other's company – and we always look forward to getting together at conferences or other venues. In retrospect, this may have been correlated a bit with life and career stages. We worked our way up the profession at a similar pace – while having kids and families- along the way. In contrast, many co-authorships are mentor-mentee relationships, especially in

the post-dissertation career lifecycle stage (in which we developed this work).

Lesson 7: *Co-authorship is more likely to work if the team is aligned on level of commitment, values, and meta-goal alignment.*

Lesson 8: *Have fun. It's not just about the work – enjoy the friendship and camaraderie.*

We should add here that scholars tend to focus on the importance of co-authors having complementary skills, such that the combined strength of the author team is greater than that of any of the co-authors. While complementarity is helpful, we would like to highlight the importance of similarity of co-author skills. In our case, while each of us had a sharply developed “feel” for some aspects of research (e.g., a vision of what a “sellable” paper would look like, an eye for spotting logical inconsistencies), both had the skill-sets to do the research independently. This proved to be invaluable in each stimulating the thinking of the other, and writing up the paper, and thus leading to a better end-product than might have been possible otherwise. We elaborate on this in the next section, but note here that selecting co-authors with some level of similarity in skills is valuable.

Lesson 9: *It is useful to select co-authors who have a core set of similar skills in addition to complementary skills.*

Doing the research

Both of us had taken a large number of courses and seminars together as we were going through our doctoral program. Perhaps because of this, we thought about theories and field-based, discovery-oriented research in similar ways. This similarity of skills and thinking styles stood us in good stead as we developed our research on market orientation.

As we started conducting the field interviews, we would discuss with each other at length what we were learning from the interviews and how these related to the extant literature. These discussions were frequent, and would happen on a regular basis, and sometimes impromptu if one learned something exciting or came up with a neat idea. These discussions were useful not only for making sure that we both were “on the same page” as our thinking evolved, but also for shaping the nature of subsequent explorations with interviewees. In course of these discussions, the insights and intuition of one stimulated the other's thinking. We would actively challenge each other but always aim to reach resolution and closure after each discussion. This was enormously stimulating, and at the same time very constructive. Importantly, this was possible because each of us could contribute substantively to the

conceptual development, and do so in an efficient way because of the similarity in skills and thinking styles.

In contrast, some argue that divergent thinking styles stretch thinking, and thus lead to bigger breakthroughs. This may be true, but we suspect such a process has the potential for co-authors to start talking past each other instead of connecting with each other and stimulating the other's thinking. In any case, our experience suggests that similarity of skills and thinking styles helps when co-authors challenge each other, not to beat down one or another perspective, but rather to improve the joint work-product.

Lesson 10: *Similarity of skills and thinking styles helps co-authors if they challenge each other with the aim of reaching closure in a constructive way.*

We now turn to some specifics of the discovery-oriented research process in which we were engaged, and the lessons we culled from our experience. We wanted to define the market orientation concept in a more precise and actionable way. We therefore asked interviewees what the term meant to them. This is not to say we had no idea of what the concept meant; we did have a fuzzy idea. And we felt it would be better to think of it in terms of a firm's activities rather than its beliefs/philosophy because the former are more closely related to firm performance, and also lend themselves to more accurate measurement using Likert type scales. However, we suspended our pre-conceptions about the concept as much as we could, and listened to what the interviewees were saying with as open minds as possible. This was not easy to do!

Furthermore, we did not stop there. We would dig deeper with questions like “tell me more about how you do this,” “who in a firm should be doing this and how often,” “what comes in the way of doing this,” and so on. Following this the two of us would get together over the phone to share what we were hearing and how they might refine our fuzzy notions, or revise them, or be incorporated into them. The main point is that details matter—they enabled us to develop a richer, more meaningful construct, and subsequently, insights on how other constructs might influence it.

As the interviews and our ideas evolved, we would cycle back periodically to what we had heard from earlier interviewees to make sure the most recent working definition of the construct was consistent with their input. If it wasn't, we would revise it to make it consistent.

Lesson 11: *Listening to interviewees is hard work. Suspending one's current views/thinking when listening to interviewees is even harder. But it is critical to suspend pre-conceptions, and listen with as blank a mind as possible in order to “capture” interviewee data.*

Lesson 12: *Push interviewees to provide specific examples, and granular information. This helps develop*

richer and more meaningful abstractions (concepts and relationships).

Lesson 13: *Relate each insight to earlier data and the “working” conceptualization reached previously. Revise the conceptualization as needed to ensure consistency.*

We often asked “flipped questions” to gain a better understanding of the market orientation concept and its antecedents. That is, we asked what is not market oriented, what does a business that is not market-oriented do, what differences in firms explain why some are market-oriented and others are not? We pushed engaged interviewees to answer sequences of “why” questions until it eventually led to an interesting idea (or a dead end). Consider the following example: When asked “what does a firm that is not market-oriented do?” one particularly engaged interviewee said that such a business does the “same old, same old” regardless of what is happening in its market. Asked to explain why a firm might do this, he indicated it is a lack of willingness to do something different. Pushed to explain why that might happen, he said it is all about top management. Asked to elaborate how so, he said top management has to be willing to do new things, not avoid them, because employees lower in the hierarchy take their cues from top managers. Pushed further, he said top management may not want to take the risk of a new initiative failing. Eventually, this led to the identification of top management risk aversion as one of the (inverse) drivers of market orientation.

Lesson 14: *Ask “flipped questions” and push a line of inquiry, and follow-on “why questions” till they lead to an insight (or a dead end).*

We found that the first 15–20 interviews led to the development of most of the ideas in our paper. The ideas emanating from the rest of the interviews overlapped hugely with what we had heard already. We formulated our core ideas after the initial 10 odd interviews, and used some of the subsequent ones to dig deeper into them. For example, we would say to an interviewee, “I heard xyz from an earlier interviewee, what do you think?” This approach would either corroborate the idea or provide a more nuanced view of it, or lead off to new directions. While we initiated each interview as a dialog designed to help us discover ideas, there was quite a bit of heterogeneity in how things panned out. Some interviews were like “magic”—we heard exciting stories, insights, and lots of “yeahs!” and “ahas!” Other interviews were more mundane. We suspect that is just the nature of the beast.

We often hear scholars complaining about the small samples used in qualitative field studies. This concern seems misplaced. If the goal is for authors to use field-data for generating new insights, what matters is the quality and number of insights generated, not the number of interviews conducted.

Lesson 15: *It is not about the number of interviews. It is about generating useful and interesting insights. And it is about reflecting on each interview in the context of earlier interviews, and following up on emerging questions in subsequent interviews.*

As we delved into the field-work and asked about market orientation and its antecedents and consequences, we would often get back a “boatload” of relevant but unstructured information and detail. This made us wonder whether we were listening to a description of what it means to be market oriented, or what leads to a market orientation or its consequences. Only after we developed a reasonably acceptable tentative definition of the concept as market information collection, interpretation, dissemination and responsiveness (this tentative definition was subsequently revised, as discussed later), were we able to categorize individual interviewee descriptions more cleanly as belonging to the construct, its antecedents or its consequences. Moreover, once we had a reasonable “grip” on the definition of the construct, it led us to identify new ideas about potential antecedents (e.g., connectedness, risk aversion).

Lesson 16: *Developing a conceptual model is an unstructured, and layered/sequential process. As concept meanings become clearer, a conceptual structure begins to emerge, and leads to lines of inquiry that enrich it. It pays to be open to discovery at every stage of the research process, not just the early stages.*

In the course of conducting the field interviews, reflecting on them, and generating ideas on our own, we literally came up with scores of ideas. We discarded many of them for one or another reason—not interesting enough, not actionable enough. While some ideas morphed into others, we did not hesitate to “dump” certain ideas altogether. Neither of us suffered from the curse of “pride of ownership”. Ultimately, the best ideas survived, and made it to the paper. This is important because we have experienced occasions when a co-author becomes “attached” to an idea s/he generated, and tries hard to get others to bend over backwards to adjust other parts of the paper to accommodate his/her idea. This ends up producing a tortured paper that lacks a clean storyline.

Lesson 17: *Do not hesitate to abandon ideas throughout the research process, no matter how much the pride of ownership.*

Both of us were assistant professors working to make tenure. So it was important to get closure on the research, get the paper published and have it considered during our tenure review. But we did not let this desire for closure come in the way of rushing the project. To the contrary, we would let an idea fester and bother us till we were finally able to resolve it to our

complete satisfaction. We found festering stimulated creativity, and our aim was to produce the best possible work-product we were capable of at the time. We think we were amply rewarded for avoiding premature closure—one of our tenure and promotion external letter writers pointed to this article as far back as 1990 as a “home run.”

Lesson 18: *Let an idea fester; do not rush to gain closure.*

We found that interviewees sometimes said things that did not make sense to us. Their narratives did not even seem to be speaking to the questions we had asked of them. Only later we better appreciated what they were trying to communicate to us. However, when we pushed interviewees to give us an example of what they were talking about, it became clear to us that the narrative was pertinent, just that the words they were using were foreign to us and/or the narrative was speaking to the phenomenon in their particular context, and needed to be abstracted away from the context so that we could understand their key points. We learned from our experiences that it is best not to pass on narratives that seem rather distant from what we may be expecting; rather it is best to push and probe for examples and/or contextual information before deciding one way or another.

Lesson 19: *When you hear an “off the wall” response, it just may lead to a good insight. Push for examples and/or contextual information to make sense of it from the interviewee’s point of view. Then “translate” using appropriate level of abstraction and your working language.*

As we began to get a grip on the meaning of the core construct of market orientation, we thought a lot about defining it in a memorable way. Based on what we were hearing from executives and our own thinking, we tentatively defined market orientation as market information collection, interpretation, dissemination and responsiveness. We fretted that defining the construct in terms of four components would be less memorable than if it had three or fewer components. We tried out many possibilities that would continue to have fidelity with the field data but would be more memorable. We eventually settled on three components and not fewer so as to capture the richness of the construct; simultaneously, we had to change “information collection and interpretation” to “intelligence generation” resulting in the definition of market orientation as “market intelligence generation, dissemination and responsiveness.”

We also identified several antecedents of market orientation. In order to put some structure on these variables, we categorized them into three levels – top management, inter-functional and organization-wide variables. We believe

scholars in the field don't remember these antecedent variables as much as they do the construct definition, its effect on performance, and moderators of this effect. Even today, we are not quite sure what we could have done better in this regard. Perhaps we could have categorized them by the process (mechanism) by which they influence market orientation. For example, if we could have identified two core processes or mechanisms by which these antecedent variables influence market orientation, this aspect of the work may have been more memorable.

More generally, we believe developing a categorization scheme should consider at least two criteria. First, each category of variables should have a unifying theme that looks like it has a reasonable amount of explanatory power. Importantly, this does not mean that a category of the antecedents needs to be part of some well-established theory that has been supported over time. Indeed, that would be an easy, lazy way to solve the problem. Rather, the set of variables in a category should “hang together” in a clear way to explain the dependent (or mediating) variables of interest. Second, and relatedly, the categories of antecedent variables should be mutually exclusive. This may not always work out, but that should be the aim.

Lesson 20: *Developing new concepts and propositions is just half the story; it is necessary to do this in a way that is memorable.*

Crafting the findings

A decision every author team faces concerns *partitioning* versus *duplication*—that is, how much of the work should be partitioned across the authors and then assembled together, and how much should be done by all authors. The logic for partitioning is that it leverages individual authors' special skills, and is more efficient (takes less time). On the other hand, the argument for duplication is that each aspect of the research is viewed and done with the benefit of input from all authors and hence likely to be of better quality.

We ended up using a combination strategy, and think it stood us in good stead. Each of us first would independently sketch out the main points that should be covered in a section (e.g., Introduction, Literature Review). Next we would share our respective plans with each other. Following that we would jointly pick the best ideas of each plan, and jointly lay out in great detail the main points to be included in the section. This helped us leverage the best ideas each of us came up with independently, uninfluenced by the other's thinking. Next one of us would take the lead in writing it up. Following that, the other would take a pass at revising the first draft of the section. Thus, we ended up using duplication followed by

partitioning, followed by reverse partitioning, and so on, until we were both satisfied with the output. We believe it is more useful to adopt this approach for conceptual papers as compared to empirical papers in which the content is far less malleable/fluid. Because of the malleability of conceptual papers, it is useful to jointly “fix” the content of each section of a paper before beginning to write it out.

Lesson 21: *When writing conceptual papers, start with “duplication”—independent ideation by each author; followed by joint determination of paper content—and follow-up with “partitioning” and then “reverse partitioning” and so on.*

Scholars often complain that their conceptual insights are downplayed by reviewers as something they “already knew” especially if they make sense and conform to their experiences. That is, once revealed, reviewers judge insights as not very novel. We were sensitive to this. The tack we took to address this concern in our original submission was to write up a Literature Review section summarizing what the literature had to say, and then added a new section on our insights based on the field. This made reading the paper cumbersome. We knew that presenting an integrated view of market orientation and its antecedents and consequences would make for an easier read. Despite this, we opted for the “two sections” approach, hoping that reviewers would then see the novel contribution of the field work, and possibly even ask us to simplify the presentation in an integrated framework. (If they did not do so in the first round, we resolved to present an integrated approach of our own accord in the next round of review.) As it turned out, one of the reviewers pointed out the “clumsiness” of the “two sections” presentation, and asked us to integrate, which is what we gladly did in the revision.

Lesson 22: *In the initial submission, find a way to demonstrate what is new in your paper even if it makes the paper a bit unwieldy.*

Looking to the future: field-based future research on market orientation

So, what's next? What specific areas of research may prove to be most beneficial – aiding both practice and theory development? Since our focus in this article has been field research, we identified five specific topics that we believe can be investigated from a field-based perspective. This is not to say there aren't other approaches – but the field-based perspective increases the “input” from firms – thereby increasing the probability of novel insights.

Our first suggestion is related to the development of a typology of market orientation. We have seen various typologies emerge in strategy (e.g., low cost, niche, differentiated) and in leadership (e.g., authentic leaders, servant leaders) – but have not seen the emergence of different types of market orientation. It could be argued that the Kohli/Jaworski approach is too abstract and broad. The framework does not work the same way operationally for all types of businesses. For example, there are short cycle businesses – here customer preferences change quickly, and products/services delivered need to change equally quickly (e.g., fashion, software). This means the intelligence generation, dissemination and responsiveness needs to be much more frequent and faster. On the other hand, there are long cycle businesses (e.g., defense industry, airplanes). Here the three stages of information processing are less frequent and slower. So basically, businesses have different rhythms. Thus, there is an opportunity to develop a typology of 3–4 prototypes of market-focused businesses, each with some implications for how they can/should be managed. Indeed, a really interesting issue may be the challenge of managing multiple businesses with very different rhythms within a single corporation.

Second, we are a bit surprised that no research has investigated whether market-oriented firms outperform customer-oriented firms. A central thesis of our approach is that the customer-focused approach is too narrow – focused on only one external stakeholder. Certainly the customer is an important stakeholder – but competitors, new technologies, and regulatory change must also be monitored and “managed.” It appears likely that under some contingencies a customer-oriented approach may be adequate, whereas in other circumstances a market-oriented approach may be better suited for business performance. Once again, field work might provide insights into the nature of contingencies that strengthen the effects of one or the other approach on business performance, and shed light on why this occurs. We recognize that ultimately a quantitative approach is best suited for this analysis (e.g. a comparison of a large sample of customer-oriented firms to a large sample of market-oriented firms). However, it may be a worthwhile first step to understand the situations where the customer-oriented (or market-oriented) approach is best suited or would benefit from in-depth discussions with thoughtful executives or CMO’s who have experience with a wide variety of product-markets.

Third, the idea of shaping, molding, and managing the evolution of markets has been around for some time, but has not taken off in terms of systematic inquiry. This is very surprising since our casual observation is that a firm that sets the rules in an industry – often leads the industry. And others end up following the firm, playing by its rules to their detriment. This would seem like an ideal scenario for the industry leader. It would be very interesting to conduct depth interviews with leader and follower firms in, say, 10 carefully-selected

diverse industries – to better understand what leaders do to shape their industries (e.g., shape the evolution of customer preferences for products, services, solutions, go-to-market approaches, competitive landscape, regulations, and so on), and document differences in behaviors of leaders and followers across industries. Relatedly, it would be of great interest to document why some firms succeed in shaping markets whereas others fail to do so despite strong efforts. The antecedents are likely to be related to firm characteristics as well as those of the customer and competitive landscapes.

Fourth, there have been interesting anthropological investigations of the evolution of market orientation within firms. These have shed light on the change process for becoming more market- and customer-oriented (e.g., Gebhardt et al. 2006; Kennedy et al. 2003). We recently have been in conversations with Becton-Dickinson concerning their 5–7 year journey to become more customer/market driven. What is most interesting in the journey is the need to “reconfigure” the roadmap for change – based upon the journey stage itself. Thus, the firm periodically asks itself “what new levers do I need to change – at this point in time,” “can I ever declare victory?”. It would be useful to conduct field-based research to better understand the evolution of a business’s needs at different stages of its evolution, and the corresponding actions that need to be taken.

Finally, like all concepts – there likely is a “dark side” of market orientation. It is unlikely that there are only “upsides” to being market-oriented. For example, it requires a deep investment in acquiring new knowledge, sharing the knowledge and using it. That means that the process (a) takes time, (b) involves many product/service divisions, and (c) impacts product development and innovation more generally. Who are the internal winners and losers? What are the total costs associated with a transformation? An examination of these issues is likely to reveal a more complete picture of the nature of market orientation and its consequences.

Conclusion

In closing, we would like to thank the Editor, Manjit Yadav, for the opportunity to reflect on our work and share our experience with the broader community. We had a blast working on the initial market orientation paper, and learnt much from the experience. This style of work looks easy when one reads the finished product. In reality it is extremely challenging, but immensely thrilling and fulfilling. We hope the lessons we have culled from our experience are helpful to scholars planning to use field data for developing new insights, constructs and theoretical propositions. If even a small set of these lessons proves to be helpful, we will consider this piece to have accomplished its purpose.

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