



In pursuit of the “ideal approach” to successful marketing strategy implementation

Marketing
strategy
implementation

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Abstract

Purpose – The main objective of this paper is to consider how firms set about strategising in marketing and the nature of their implementation effort. Prior research has not considered the alternative means of implementation that firms display in practice.

Design/methodology/approach – A model is developed from a mid-level (marketing) managerial perspective by comparing three groups of strategy implementation types (“change”, “collaborative”, and “cultural”) against five contextual and process characteristics of marketing strategy implementation.

Findings – Contrary to literature that has recommended bottom-up marketing planning, the findings show if the firm displays an implementation environment characterised by hierarchical structures and strong top-down influences, then marketing strategy implementation will be more effective.

Research limitations/implications – More analysis of the daily lives of mid-level employees is essential to improve the understanding of the key implementation success factors. Also, more research is needed on the influence of firm factors, such as culture, structure and management style, in determining the context for implementation.

Practical implications – The strategic paradox in the results suggests that there is a need for a degree of top-down imposition, yet it also suggested that fostering the cooperation of mid-level marketing managers through bottom-up initiatives is required in the implementation process.

Originality/value – Provocatively, the paper concludes that the movement to restructure corporate hierarchies should not amount to a rejection of hierarchy as an organising principle in terms of implementing marketing strategies more effectively. The data indicate that a hierarchical implementation style will positively enhance the performance of those strategies.

Keywords Marketing strategy, Marketing management, Middle managers, Service industries

Paper type Research paper

Introduction and background

In recent years organisations have sought to create greater organisational flexibility in responding to environmental turbulence by moving away from hierarchical structures to more modular forms (Schilling and Steensma, 2001; Balogun and Johnson, 2004). Responsibility, resources and power in firms has been the subject of decentralisation and delayering. Given an intensifying competitive environment, it is regularly asserted

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that the critical determinant in the success and, doubtlessly, the survival of the firm is the successful implementation of marketing strategies (Chebat, 1999; Noble, 1999; Bonoma, 1984). The role and tasks of those employees charged with strategy implementation duties, the mid-level managers, in these new restructured organisations is under scrutiny.

Historically, numerous researchers in strategic management, and to a lesser extent in strategic marketing, bestowed great significance to the strategic formulation process and considered strategy implementation as a mere by-product or invariable consequence of planning (Anderson, 1982; Day and Wensley, 1983; Wind and Robertson, 1983). Fortunately, insights in this area have been made recently which temper our knowledge of developing marketing strategy with the reality of executing that which is crafted (e.g. Varadarajan *et al.*, 2001; Piercy, 2002; Miller *et al.*, 2004; Noble, 1999; Noble and Mokwa, 1999; Homburg *et al.*, 2004; Olson *et al.*, 2005; Chimhanzi and Morgan, 2005; Lewis, 2005; Qi, 2005). However, as strategy implementation is both a multifaceted and complex organisational process, it is only by taking a broad view that a wide span of potentially valuable insights is generated.

Research emphasising strategy implementation is classified by Bourgeois and Brodwin (1984) as part of a first wave of studies proposing structural views as important facilitators for marketing strategy implementation success (Miles and Snow, 1978; Porter, 1980; Drazin and Howard, 1984). Beyond the preoccupation of many authors with firm structure, a second wave of investigations advocated interpersonal processes and issues as crucial to any marketing strategy implementation effort (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1989; Westley, 1990; Noble and Mokwa, 1999). Conflicting empirical results founded upon contrasting theoretical premises indicate that marketing strategy implementation is a complex phenomenon. In response, generalisations have been advanced in the form of encouraging: early involvement in the strategy process by firm members (Hambrick and Cannella, 1989); fluid processes for adaptation and adjustment (Drazin and Howard, 1984); and, leadership style and structure (Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984).

It is not surprising therefore that marketing strategy implementation is a topic of great interest to both managers and strategy researchers. Indeed, Noble and Mokwa (1999) affirm that an integrative view encompassing both structural and interpersonal views can enhance our understanding of the factors leading to marketing implementation success. Despite the recent interest in marketing strategy implementation research, there is a significant need for more detailed and comprehensive models related to marketing strategy implementation (Noble, 1999). This study aims to rectify this broadness of approach by creating a detailed and comprehensive conceptual model related to marketing strategy implementation. This is done by grounding the work in the roots already established by previous researchers in the area (Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984; Parsa, 1999; Noble, 1999; Noble and Mokwa, 1999).

It is clearly apparent that a current challenge for marketing management lies in implementing marketing strategy rather than formulating it, in creating and sustaining a climate within the firm that motivates employees in their implementation role (Dobni, 2003). Not all firms implement their marketing strategies in the same manner; nevertheless, research investigating the differing styles of implementation is scarce. Nutt (1995) utilises Jungian theory (Jung, 1923) for his framework of

implementation style, however, this is very much an analysis of the psychological style of individuals within the firm. More recently, Parsa (1999) utilised Bourgeois and Brodwin's (1984) classification of strategy implementation types. Also, implementation appears much more closely tied to the daily activities of mid-level marketing managers (Floyd and Wooldridge, 2000; Guth and MacMillan, 1986), despite comparably little research attention being entrusted to the factors that induce mid-level marketing managers' implementation success (Dopson and Stewart, 1990; Currie, 1999).

The aim of this study was to rectify this theoretical lacuna through the exploration of contextual and process characteristics of mid-level marketing managers. Process factors in this study include the degree of consistency between the strategic plan itself and its execution by mid-level marketing managers (Huy, 2001) as well as the degree of direction and leadership given by senior management in guiding the implementation process. Contextual influences encompass the alignment of organisational structure and systems for effective marketing strategy implementation as well as influence the efficiency of the marketing strategy execution and ultimately how well the marketing strategy performed, once implemented. The objective was to consider these characteristics and identify a natural or inherent grouping of marketing strategy implementation types as a mechanism to aid research. A strategy implementation classification was employed based on Bourgeois and Brodwin's (1984) categorisation in an attempt to identify an ideal approach to implementing marketing strategies successfully. We now present the conceptual background to this study prior to describing the empirical method, conclude with a discussion of key findings and a consideration of the implications for both managers and academics.

Marketing strategy implementation types

At the firm level, extant research has observed that the effective relationship between strategy and structure is a necessary precondition to the successful implementation of new business strategies (Drazin and Howard, 1984; Olson *et al.*, 2005; Miller *et al.*, 2004). In addition, a match between appropriate administrative mechanisms and strategy has been found to reduce uncertainty within the firm and increase effectiveness in marketing strategy implementation (Govindarajan, 1988). The relevant literature (Noble, 1999; Noble and Mokwa, 1999) has advocated factors that influence the effective implementation of marketing strategies, for example; organisational structure (Miles and Snow, 1978; Drazin and Howard, 1984); control mechanisms (Daft and Mackintosh, 1984; Jaworski *et al.*, 1993); strategic consensus (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1989; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992); leadership (Gupta and Govindarajan, 1984; Nutt, 1983); and communication (Workman, 1993; Hambrick and Cannella, 1989). However, prior research has neglected to ascertain whether the "style" of marketing strategy implementation undertaken has any impact on the effectiveness of the implementation effort.

Mintzberg (1979, 1993) proposed that firms differ in terms of their structure and that theory should move away from the "one best way" approach towards a contingency approach, in that structure should reflect the firm's situation and strategies. The structure of a firm influences the flow of information and the context and nature of interpersonal interaction within it. Structure also channels collaboration, prescribes means of communication and co-ordination as well as allocating power and responsibility (Miller, 1987). Traditionally, firms have addressed these basic needs for

coordination and cooperation by hierarchical configurations (Grant, 2002), with centralised decision-making, strict adherence to formally prescribed rules and procedures and carefully constructed roles and relationships. Others, due to the unpopularity of bureaucracy in large firms, started a movement toward de-layering hierarchies (Homburg *et al.*, 2000; Workman *et al.*, 1998). Downsizing has resulted in the roles of employees altering dramatically as structure is re-engineered (Balogun, 2003; Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999). These firms are characterised by decentralised decision-making, small senior marketing executive teams and an emphasis on horizontal rather than vertical communication (Webster, 1992). With firms evolving in terms of structure it follows that the style of marketing strategy implementation will differ depending on the style of organisation and management that exists in the firm. In general terms, Nutt (1983, 1986, 1995) and Gupta and Govindarajan (1984) find that types of leadership style can play a critical role in overcoming barriers to implementation and latterly Redding and Catalanello (1994) and Moorman and Miner (1998) proposed an improvisational approach to implementing strategic change in an organisation. These studies, however, have focused attention entirely at the organisational or functional unit level to the detriment of a more micro-manager level focus. Our progressive work seeks to explore this issue, by proposing a taxonomy of implementation styles and focusing attention on the role of those bestowed with the duties of implementation within large firms, the mid-level marketing manager.

Strategic typologies are becoming ever popular in researching marketing strategy (Speed, 1993). Taxonomy, the classifying of phenomena and the explanation of the classification used, facilitates the development of our knowledge (Hempel, 1965; Mayr, 1969; McKelvey, 1982; Galbraith and Schendel, 1983). Taxonomic approaches have become commonplace in marketing theory and in the study of marketing strategy especially. The majority of extant taxonomy models in marketing strategy implementation tend to be normative in nature (Parsa, 1999). Alternatively, they are developed from organisational observation, and as such, become context specific and frequently lack any broader theoretical grounding (Miles and Snow, 1978; Porter, 1980; Hooley *et al.*, 1992, Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). In contrast, Bourgeois and Brodwin's (1984) model is comprehensive, is based on specific theoretical assumptions and has been used by authors such as Parsa (1999). Bourgeois and Brodwin (1984) to refute the traditional approach to marketing strategy implementation as simply an adjunct to the strategy formulation phase of the strategy process. Rather, they contend that marketing strategy implementation evolves either from a process of winning group commitment through a coalitional form of decision-making, or as a result of complete coalitional involvement of implementation staff through a strong corporate culture.

Co-evolutionary theory (Lewin and Volberda, 1999) indicates that as firms grow and evolve from small to larger and multidivisional organisations, the strategy implementation methods also evolve simultaneously. The various strategy implementation models described by Bourgeois and Brodwin (1984) are meant to meet the changing needs of firms as they evolve through various stages of the organisational life cycle (Parsa, 1999). In contrast to the earlier descriptive models, this model is more prescriptive with an, albeit limited, empirical basis. Our research highlights three of Bourgeois and Brodwin's (1984) classifications of strategy implementation styles: change, collaborative, and cultural[1].

Change model

This hierarchical model emphasises how organisational structure, incentive compensation, and control systems can be used to facilitate the implementation of marketing strategy. Here the senior marketing executive team (SMET) acts as an architect and uses behavioural science techniques to manage the firm to meet the needs of the marketing strategy. The change model can be identified through the changing of structure and staff to convey the firm's new priorities; alternating planning, performance measurement, incentive compensation systems; and using of cultural adaptation techniques to introduce system changes. The senior managers not only pass the marketing strategy to their subordinates, but also take part in the implementation phase (DeWit and Meyer, 2004). However, the change model has its limitations under the circumstances of inaccurate information, disincentives against objectivity by managers, and motivational problems (Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984).

According to this model, there is a greater concordance between the "thinkers" (those employees exhibiting cerebral tendencies, preferring intellectual judgement and reasoning to solve organisational problems) and "doers" (those employees manifesting the practical ability to make things happen and exhibit intra-preneurial flair). An appreciation of the political nature of the firm is essential in implementing desired strategies. The marketing strategy content is considered as an evolving process, rather than as a set of predetermined plans. The goals of the firm remain predominantly economic but are adjusted to reflect specific strengths and weaknesses of the firm.

Collaborative model

This alternative model focuses on group decision-making at a senior management level and involves SMETs in the strategy formulation process. In this way it expects a firm to have a formalised strategic planning system. The role of the SMET is to employ group dynamics and "brainstorming" approaches to involve managers in both strategy formulation and implementation phases. Here, the SMET plays the role of coordinator, encouraging and promoting differing ideas and acting as a consensus generator among various implementation groups (Goold and Quinn, 1990). The SMET is co-coordinator rather than commander and to achieve desired performance results, teamwork is strongly encouraged. As a result, the behavioural nature of the firm dominates. The collaborative model overcomes both the limitations of information inaccuracy and cognitive limits of the change model (Parsa, 1999), as highlighted previously.

In this mode, organisations have both a strong culture and deep-rooted traditions. Successful implementation requires the cultivation of strong cultural values to meet the changing organisational needs. The distinction between "thinkers" and "doers" begins to blur but does not totally disappear. This model requires greater emphasis on human resource practices and as a result, the chosen marketing strategy is a best possible compromise among the conflicting views of the differing groups. The outcome measures are not necessarily determined in economic terms but as levels of long-term goal achievement. However, there are possibilities that the collaborative model is politically feasible but not economically rational due to the fact that it is the outcome of negotiation (Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984).

Cultural model

The cultural model emphasises a lower level employee participation in both marketing strategy formulation and implementation thus leading to the disappearance of the

separation of “thinkers” and “doers”. It seeks to implement marketing strategy through the infusion of corporate culture throughout the firm. The SMET is an initiator, a visionary, and a communicator of the forward thinking process, thus the marketing strategy of an organisation is stated in terms of broad guidelines and long-term direction.

In this model, the SMET guides the organisation by communicating the vision for the firm while then allowing lower level employees to participate in the marketing strategy implementation. The model works under the circumstances of decentralised organisation, where there are shared goals between the firm and its participants, and where the firm is stable and growing. Understanding super-ordinate goals, style, and cultural norms become essential for the continued success of a firm. The cultural model contradicts and challenges the basic objectives from the economic perspective of a firm (Parsa, 1999). A “clan-like” (Ouchi, 1980) organisation is expected to prevail, where a powerful culture results in employees aligning their individual goals and behaviours with those of the firm.

However, a high level of organisational slack is needed to instil and maintain a cultural model. This model has several limitations: it assumes well-informed and intelligent participants; firms with this model tend to drift and lose focus; cost of change in culture often comes at a high price; increased homogeneity can lead to a loss of diversity, and creativity consequently (Parsa, 1999).

Each implementation style differs in the extent of centrality, the extent of group interaction, the degree of control exerted, the influence of firm culture and the way in which strategy develops. Bourgeois and Brodwin (1984) postulate that these are not mutually exclusive forms, and do not indicate that any style is necessarily better than the other. In spite of this stance however, we argue that hierarchical structures, similar to that advocated by the “change” style of implementation (Grant, 2002) are essential for creating the efficient and flexible co-ordination of marketing strategy implementation.

Contextual and process characteristics of strategic market planning

A degree of hierarchy and control is rudimentary to the structure of most large firms and hierarchy is present in virtually all complex systems (Cappelli, 2005; Leavitt, 2003; March and Simon, 1956). Mintzberg (1993) proposes two fundamental organisational requirements: coordination and cooperation.

Undeniably coordination is critical to the performance of any firm. The specialist implementation skills possessed by a mid-level marketing manager as an individual do not fully contribute to the organisational skills base, unless these individuals can coordinate their efforts. The challenge for any manager is how to coordinate the efforts of talented employees within a limited time frame and to ensure that the aims and mission of the intended marketing strategy is clearly understood. Firms can aid this process through rules, directives and routines (Grant, 2002). Coordination deals with only the technical problem of integrating the actions of mid-level marketing managers within firms. Cooperation, however, concerns the building mechanisms that link individuals in ways that permit them to perform given tasks, such as implement the marketing strategy effectively.

Daft and Mackintosh (1984) explore the role of formal control systems in gaining cooperation in marketing strategy implementation. Jaworski *et al.* (1993) showed a

strong correlation between the type of control and coordination system in use and firm performance, implying that the nature of the control system in an implementation effort is a critical decision. Despite the negative connotations associated with hierarchical and top-down approaches to marketing management, it is argued that such structures are essential for creating a conducive marketing strategy implementation environment (Dobni, 2003) that facilitates coordination and cooperation.

In this way, we argue that for marketing strategies to be implemented efficiently by mid-level marketing managers the firm must display a degree of hierarchical style and bureaucratic structure. Power should be located at the apex of the hierarchy and delegated downward, while the achievement of coordination and cooperation remain paramount (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990). Senior marketing executives should seek to direct, communicate with, and involve, mid-level marketing managers to win their support, a feeling of ownership for the marketing strategy and their compliance with the roles set for them. (Whitney and Smith, 1983; Piercy, 1991). Indeed, some authors have emphasised the importance of mid-level marketing managers' perceptions that senior management is doing all it can to facilitate the marketing strategy implementation process (Johnson and Frohman, 1989; Balogun, 2003; Huy, 2001; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1997). Furthermore, the strategic consensus literature provides a broad range of views of the value of a collective mind set during implementation efforts (Ambrosini and Bowman, 2003; Dooley *et al.*, 2000; Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992). Nielsen (1983) contends that firms must achieve consensus and cooperation within the firm in order to gain compliance from managers to successfully implement marketing strategies. The benefit of a shared understanding and the perception that the marketing strategy is being coordinated by senior marketing executives effectively is a development of a commitment among managers and a reduction of uncertainty in the firm as a whole (Noble, 1999; Whitney and Smith, 1983). Shared understanding of the strategy and a degree of direction from senior management should, in turn, improve strategic performance and the overall efficiency of the implementation effort.

Moreover, for high levels of coordination and cooperation, how similar senior marketing executives ideas are with that of the ideas of mid-level marketing managers in terms of the marketing strategy in question has been recognised as key in the creation of an atmosphere conducive to effective marketing strategy implementation (Noble and Mokwa, 1999). The importance of "championing" has been discussed in a wide range of literature (Marginson, 2002; Noble and Mokwa, 1999; Sandy, 1991; Hutt *et al.*, 1988). Nutt (1983) explains that champions serve many purposes, including mobilising firm resources, generating momentum for the marketing strategy and making sure that the goals of the marketing strategy are clear to all those charged with implementation duties. Also, a charismatic and powerful champion, or senior marketing executive, is likely to instil a higher level of commitment among lower level employees towards the marketing strategy (Noble, 1999). Furthermore, securing the support of the senior marketing executive team is often essential in marketing strategy implementation (Floyd and Wooldridge, 2000; Jiang *et al.*, 1996; Whitney and Smith, 1983) and some authors have emphasised the importance of mid-level marketing managers' perceptions that senior management is doing all it can to facilitate the implementation process (Johnson and Frohman, 1989; Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999).

In this way we sought to consider five contextual and process characteristics of marketing strategy implementation with which to examine differences between the three marketing strategy implementation types. In summary we hypothesise that:

- (1) firms adopting a “change” mode of marketing strategy implementation will exhibit greater levels of strategic performance;
- (2) mid-level marketing managers’ compliant behaviour;
- (3) senior management executive team strategic direction;
- (4) strategic clarity; and
- (5) strategic efficiency than firms adopting a “collaborative” mode which in turn will exhibit greater levels of each of the above (“(1)” through “(5)”) than firms adopting a “cultural” mode.

Research method

Sample

To test the research model, a series of measures were developed from extant sources. Compliant behaviour was determined using measures adapted from Kim and Mauborgne (1993) and Noble and Mokwa (1999) for role autonomy. The scale for SMET direction was adjusted from Noble and Mokwa’s (1999) measures for championing behaviour by senior executives. We developed new measures for the remaining three variables. Scale construction was articulated around a seven-point Likert type scoring ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The style of marketing strategy implementation was measured by developing a new instrument based on Bourgeois and Brodwin (1984) and Parsa’s (1999) description of implementation types (see Table I for item descriptions).

This determined that respondents could be classified as “change” ($n = 22$), “collaborative” ($n = 46$), and “cultural” ($n = 19$) in their marketing strategy implementation approach.

The pre-test phase of the questionnaire development process for this survey concerned the content validity aspects of the instrument. First, content validity referred to the degree to which the items of the scales adequately reflected the relevant theoretical domains in question (Green *et al.*, 1988). In an attempt to adopt a delphi approach, an effort was made to solicit opinions from known groups (Green *et al.*, 1988) that could offer an expert insight into the content validity of the questionnaire. Discussions and correspondence were carried out between the authors and research academics with knowledge of implementation effectiveness and mid-level managers within large organisations. Suggestions for improving content validity offered by these individuals were considered and certain issues incorporated into the questionnaire.

The postal-questionnaire survey involved a multi-firm sample of European service-based strategic business unit, all UK based and in the telecommunications, transport and financial industries. We targeted service-based industries as they tend to contribute more to UK GDP than manufacturing organisations and therefore constitute the majority and growing proportion of the economy (Javalgi and White, 2002; Javalgi *et al.*, 2003; Wirtz, 2000). Typically, most strategy studies tend to focus on product-based organisations with a common bias towards industrial manufacturers. Given the pre-disposition of service organisations toward the supply of intangible customer offerings, internal organisational processes play a significant part in the

Marketing strategy implementation type	Self-typing descriptions
Change	A systematic and methodical approach is taken towards strategic decision-making. The success of decision-making is generally measured in terms of economic goals. I understand the goals of the business unit and its 'political' nature. My supervisor has good people skills and leads by example
Collaborative	Teamwork is strongly encouraged in this business unit. My supervisor acts as co-ordinator by encouraging and promoting differing ideas and also as a consensus generator among various groups. Brainstorming sessions are often conducted so that everyone can have input into the strategy process. The business unit's goals have been clearly explained to me
Cultural	I am encouraged to develop my own long-term plans and the execution details of implementing strategy are left to me. My supervisor acts as an initiator, a visionary and a communicator of the forward thinking process. Openness is encouraged within this business unit. Employees work together to a common purpose and are able to participate fully in strategy decisions at all levels

Note: Self-typing scale where respondents were asked to identify which type best described their method of marketing strategy implementation. Two additional implementation types were measured (the "commander" and "crescive" types – see Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984) but due to insufficient observations these were removed from the typology presented

Table I.
Marketing strategy
implementation styles:
item descriptions

determination of business practices and performance. Consequently, examining the nature of strategy implementation activities within such a process-oriented environment is potentially insightful.

Each sampling unit was considered to be medium or large-sized, employing over two hundred and fifty employees. This ensured that each unit was of a comparable size. In designing the survey methodology our aim was to ensure that the most appropriate individual available was identified and selected in the sampling frame from whom to elicit the required information. The review of the literature and resulting conceptualisation explained how the most important individual within the SBU regarding the effectiveness of strategy implementation were those marketing managers at the mid-level (Noble, 1999; Floyd and Wooldridge, 2000; Delmestri and Walgenbach, 2005). These informants were selected because of their knowledge of the topics under study and their ability to communicate about them (Slater and Atuahene-Gima, 2004). Therefore the postal questionnaire targeted these mid-level marketing managers as single key-informants (Huber and Power, 1985) in all sampling units. We followed the tailored design method (Dillman, 2000) to stimulate respondent involvement and improve response in survey research. Checks on respondent job titles and positions revealed that all respondents were mid-level marketing managers. By using rater reliability and rater significance instruments within the questionnaire the authors were able to ensure a degree of consistency in the respondent sample. Indeed the vast majority of key informants were marketing managers (46 per cent); furthermore, the remaining 54 per cent respondents were employed in a position that could be deemed to be one of a mid-organisation appointment in a marketing function.

Other questions contained in the survey instrument were designed to ensure that respondents had accumulated enough years of working experience to be qualified to answer questions in this area and that respondents had been employed by the present organisation for a period long enough to be deemed competent to possess the knowledge needed to answer the questionnaire accurately. Respondents were also asked to indicate the significance of their role in implementing the strategy under scrutiny in the survey (Noble and Mokwa, 1999).

It was further acknowledged that respondents had, on average, been employed by their present organisation for nearly eight years and had over 14 years of working experience, indicating adequate sagacity in the area to effectively answer the questions posed. All other rater reliability and rater significance variables exhibited mean scores of between 5.17 and 5.34, above the mid-point of 4 on a seven point Likert scale, emphasising the correct targeting of respondents for the survey administration. An early-late response test indicated that non-response bias was not an issue (Armstrong and Overton, 1977).

Of the 600 postal questionnaires distributed to sampling units, the total number of eligible responses was 115 yielding a 19 per cent response rate which compares favourably with other studies that have investigated similar research topics and is considered acceptable for a postal survey approach (c.f. Kanuk and Berenson, 1975).

Analysis and results

Scale construction

The application of principal components analysis was used to transform the sets of construct-specific interrelated variables into a composition of unrelated linear combinations of these variables. Table II illustrates the properties of each contextual and process characteristic of strategic planning used in the analysis. Alpha has been proposed as the most appropriate means of assessing reliability in marketing research (Peter, 1979) and as can be seen all scales exhibited adequate internal consistency with Cronbach alpha coefficients greater than 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). The validation for each scale was assessed by item-total correlation analysis (Nunnally, 1967). Only correlations that were substantially high and in the expected direction were accepted (Cook and Campbell, 1979). Furthermore, it was a condition of acceptance that each item-total correlation coefficient be highly statistically significant. In Table II it is evident that item-total scale correlation coefficients were positive and statistically significant (coefficients ranged from 0.48 to 0.93, $\alpha \leq 0.001$). Consequently, it can be suggested that each item contributes to derived scale index and is therefore a valid indicator of the relevant construct. Thus, the scales for the contextual and process characteristics of strategic planning (STRATPERF – strategic performance; COMP_BEH – compliant behaviour; SMET_DIR – senior marketing executive team direction; STRAT_CLAR – strategic clarity; STRAT_EFF – strategic efficiency) were considered suitable for further analysis.

Inter-group differences

In this study we set out to examine and compare three groups of strategy implementation types against five contextual and process characteristics of marketing strategy implementation from extant literature. Eight hypotheses are proposed to distinguish between each of the three implementation styles and to propose a hierarchy

Scale composition	Cronbach's alpha and item-total scale correlation ^a
<i>STRAT_PERF</i> – <i>strategic performance</i>	0.90
Our strategy is an example of effective strategy execution	0.86
I personally think that the implementation of the strategy was a success	0.89
This strategy is not meeting its targets (r)	0.85
<i>COMP_BEH</i> – <i>compliant behaviour</i>	0.81
Overall, my actions since the last annual planning process have been fully consistent with executing the strategic decisions to the letter and spirit with which they were established	0.86
When given the opportunity for managerial discretion, I tended to disregard and even subvert the corporate strategic decisions in the interests of my unit (r)	0.74
I followed the final strategic decisions made by head office with extreme care	0.70
<i>SMET_DIR</i> – <i>senior marketing executive team direction</i>	0.96
Top management do not seem to care much about the strategy (r)	0.91
I do not feel that top management place a great deal of significance on this strategy (r)	0.92
It is clear that top management want this strategy to be a success	0.93
I feel that this strategy is strongly supported by top management	0.87
<i>STRAT_CLAR</i> – <i>strategic clarity</i>	0.90
Every person is committed to making sure deadlines are met	0.86
We effectively execute the actions detailed in the plan	0.87
Rewards in the venture are clearly linked to the requirements of the plan	0.81
The monitoring system is well aligned with the plan	0.86
The current strategy is not well aligned with the business unit's structure (r)	0.48
<i>STRAT_EFF</i> – <i>strategic efficiency</i>	0.90
It took longer then expected to get the strategy up and running (r)	0.89
Not everything was lined up to make the strategy happen (r)	0.81
The strategy was quickly executed	0.84

Note: ^aPearson's r. All correlations are statistically significant where $\alpha \leq 0.001$; (r) item reversed scored for analysis purposes

Table II.
Measurement properties
of the contextual and
process characteristics of
strategic planning

in terms of strategic performance. Our analysis of the literature disclosed that a change model would exhibit greater levels of strategic performance followed by the collaborative model and finally the cultural model.

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to test the null that no significant differences existed between the three marketing strategy implementation groups. Here, we were simultaneously exploring whether there were any significant differences among the marketing implementation groups. The results yielded a Wilks' lambda = 0.71, F = 2.66 ($\alpha = 0.005$). However, in order to identify the contribution of each marketing strategy implementation dimension to strategy implementation group differences, a second stage of analysis was necessary to identify potential univariate effects.

We used the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical technique as the best method to fully explore whether there were any significant differences among the marketing implementation groups (Change, Collaborative, Cultural) in relation to each of

the five strategy implementation dimensions. This test investigated the presence of significant differences among the marketing strategy implementation groups in relation to each of the strategy implementation dimensions. *Post hoc* analysis as a statistical test of mean differences was then performed after the statistical tests for main effects were carried out. *Post hoc* tests inspect for differences among all possible combinations of groups. Tukey's test is among the most common post hoc procedure and provided us with a test of each combination of group and simplified the interpretative process. Table III presents several significant differences that were identified.

All the profile characteristic dimensions reported significant inter-groups differences as indicated by the statistically significant F-ratios ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) calculated (Table III). By inspecting the means scores for the "change" implementation type it is possible to recognise that this group demonstrated significantly greater emphasis in each marketing strategy context and process dimension, apart from strategic efficiency, than both the other groups. Indeed, it would seem that a "change" implementation type is more favourable across four of the profile characteristics than either a "collaborative" or "cultural" implementation type. There is also some evidence to indicate that firms adopting a "collaborative" mode of marketing strategy implementation exhibit better results than firms adopting a "cultural" mode. The post hoc analysis results indicate that in terms of strategic performance, our study hypothesis is supported, as "cultural" firm types perform better than "cultural" firm types.

Interestingly, in considering the profile characteristic of strategic clarity, the post hoc findings only partially supported our hypothesis in that firms which adopted a "change" mode of marketing strategy implementation only exhibited greater levels of strategic efficiency than firms adopting either a "collaborative" mode. Moreover, post hoc results for strategic efficiency against the strategy implementation types were not significant.

Conclusions and implications

In essence, our results suggest that firms displaying an implementation style akin to Bourgeois and Brodwin's (1984) "change" model, implement marketing strategies more effectively than firms displaying either a "collaborative" or "cultural" style. Firms that emphasise the importance of a rigid organisational structure, visible control systems and other hierarchical factors, such as reward systems, should implement their marketing strategies better than firms which try to foster consensus, and a team working culture with more decentralised and informal structures.

This conclusion is somewhat provocative on the basis that for much of the twentieth century the traditional bureaucratic, hierarchical structure has dominated thinking about firm design and structure (Grant, 2002) but this has been obviated by increasing movement toward de-layering hierarchies. Global competition, deregulation and accelerating technological change has made the business environment of most firms less stable and less predictable. It is these changes that have revealed the shortcomings of firms organised along bureaucratic principles and have promoted more organic, flexible and multi-task structures.

In spite of this, the results of our study indicate that the movement to reform and restructure corporate hierarchies should not amount to a rejection of hierarchy as an organising principle in terms of implementing marketing strategies more effectively. Indeed, our data indicates that a hierarchical implementation style will positively enhance the performance of those strategies.

Profile characteristics	CHANGE (CH)	Strategy implementation types COLLABORATIVE (CO)	CULTURAL (CU)	F-ratio	Tukey's test ($\alpha \leq 0.05$)
STRAT_PERF	5.53 (1.02)	5.49 (0.68)	4.85 (1.05)	4.13*	CH > CU; CO > CU
COMP_BEH	5.59 (0.89)	4.93 (0.69)	4.91 (0.80)	5.79**	CH > CO; CH > CU
SMET_DIR	6.33 (0.62)	5.71 (0.90)	5.28 (1.24)	8.16**	CH > CO; CH > CU
STRAT_CLAR	5.35 (0.88)	4.61 (1.05)	4.75 (1.00)	4.89**	CH > CO
STRAT_EFF	4.91 (1.43)	4.50 (0.83)	4.21 (0.93)	2.67*	n/s

Notes: MANOVA: Wilks' lambda = 0.71; F = 2.66; * $\alpha \leq 0.05$; ** $\alpha \leq 0.01$

Table III.
Marketing strategy
implementation group
differences: multivariate
and univariate
differences

Mid-level marketing managers have, in the past, been subjected to a great deal of criticism having been the target of downsizing and re-engineering carried out by most firms (Dopson and Stewart, 1990). Although mid-level marketing managers make an important contribution to firm objectives, their roles may be changing as responsibility is delegated downwards in the flatter organisation of today (Balogun, 2003; Thomas and Dunkerley, 1999). Mid-level marketing managers are valuable in their contributions to the realisation of marketing strategies within firms, but unfortunately, their bestowments are seldom recognised by senior level staff. Mid-level marketing managers regularly generate value-adding entrepreneurial concepts directly resulting from their unique position in the firm (Huy, 2001). They are perfectly accomplished and glad to realise these ideas, if only they are directed well by the senior marketing executive team. Research readily acknowledges that the key strategic task of mid-level marketing managers is implementing marketing strategy (Currie, 1999), yet little research has examined the role they take during implementation or what helps or hinders them in fulfilling this role.

For firms that are seeking a blueprint for effective strategy implementation (Bruce, 2005; Harpum, 2005; Lewis, 2005) the implication for managers is that a strategic paradox arises here. Our results suggest that there is a need for a degree of top-down imposition, yet at the same time we suggest that fostering the cooperation of mid-level marketing managers as key resources in the implementation process; a degree of bottom-up initiative; is also required. These are conflicting demands that are difficult for managers to meet at the same time (DeWit and Meyer, 2004). Our study suggests that the senior marketing executive team cannot realise the objective of implementing marketing strategies effectively without some level of control. They need to be able to direct the development of the marketing strategy, while engaging those mid-level marketing managers tasked with the vital implementation role (Goold and Quinn, 1990). It would seem that the challenge for firms is to encourage the SMET to recognise the need to value mid-level expertise, to respect and involve them in order to gain implementation allies.

In today's business environment a mix of senior executive direction and mid-level marketing management initiative is demanded (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990). To be effective at implementing marketing strategies, senior marketing executives need to clearly articulate the context of the marketing strategy and develop hierarchical structures that foster a facilitative environment for marketing strategy implementation and encourage mid-level marketing managers to think strategically.

In terms of future research potential, this study has drawn attention to the area of marketing strategy implementation and serves to synthesise advances in the study of implementation, structured around three process models first identified by Bourgeois and Brodwin (1984). Although the research area of strategy implementation is burgeoning there are still numerous forms that future efforts might take. Firstly, there is significant need for more detailed and comprehensive conceptual models related to strategy implementation due to the very fragmented research to date. Secondly, as implementation appears more closely tied to the activities of mid level marketing managers it appears essential to better understand the daily lives of these employees if we are to improve our understanding of this process and the key success factors involved in implementation. Virtually all prior implementation research has examined factors and outcomes at an organisational level, despite the fact that a managerial-level view of

implementation may provide valuable insights. Lastly, and based on the results in this study, it seems clear that aspects of the firm, such as culture, structure and management style may have a profound effect on implementation processes and ultimately its success. We advocate that more research is needed on the influence of firm factors in determining the context for implementation by mid level marketing managers.

Note

1. Following pre-study interviews with selected managers, we truncated Bourgeois and Brodwin's (1984) and Parsa's (1999) original five strategy implementation styles to three, eliminating the commander and crevice types at either end of their model. Pre-study interviews with a series of mid-level marketing managers suggested a concern with face validity and a reluctance to indicate the extreme values of the strategy implementation classifications; as such we amended the conceptualisation for present purposes.

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