

Is diffusion of marketing competence necessary for a market orientation?

A comparative investigation of marketing managers and their defining traits

Diffusion of marketing competence

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James M. Loveland

Marketing Department, Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA

Scott A. Thompson

Department of Marketing, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA

John W. Lounsbury

Department of Psychology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, USA, and

Danilo Dantas

Service de l'Enseignement de Marketing, HEC Montreal, Montreal, Canada

Abstract

Purpose – Increasingly, scholars and analysts are urging firms to transition from a model in which marketing is a discrete function to a diffused approach in which marketing is everyone's job. Prior research has examined differences in firm level performance. However, this firm level focus has overlooked what effects this transition might have on the managers who perform the marketing role. The purpose of this paper is to investigate manager level consequences of transitioning between these approaches by evaluating differences in person-environment (P-E) fit between marketers and non-marketers.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors identify core marketing functions and relevant personality traits of marketing managers, based on the marketing literature. The authors then compare personality and career satisfaction data from 465 marketing managers against a larger, general employment sample of 3,100 employees. Finally, the authors examine the relationship of career satisfaction to each of these traits and investigate how these relationships differ across the two groups.

Findings – The authors find important differences between marketers and non-marketers. Most importantly, the authors found that the relationships between personality and career satisfaction were significantly different for traits suggested by the research literature as important to the marketing function. In particular, customer orientation, visionary leadership, optimism, and assertiveness were all associated with higher career satisfaction for the marketing sample than for the general sample.

Originality/value – This paper is among the first to examine manager level differences relevant to transitioning between firm level marketing approaches. For firms considering adopting the "everyone is a marketer" diffused approach, the findings reveal pitfalls that can lead to reduced career satisfaction, reduced manager performance, and increased turnover. As a result, the performance of firms that have already adopted a diffused approach may be misleading for those firms who have not. At a minimum, firms contemplating a transition to a diffused approach should conduct an assessment of P-E fit similar to that illustrated in this paper to assess the potential risks.

Keywords Marketing strategy, Career satisfaction, Marketing management, P-E fit, Role of marketing in firm

Paper type Research paper



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1. Introduction

The role of marketing and marketing managers within the firm is a topic of debate among educators and practitioners alike, with many lamenting the fact that marketing is losing its voice in the boardroom and across the firm in general (e.g. Verhoef and Leeflang, 2009). At the same time, many marketing scholars and analysts are urging firms to transition from a model in which marketing is a discrete function to one in which marketing is diffused across the firm (e.g. Harris *et al.*, 2008). The literature on market orientation indicates that marketing capability is a cultural asset of the firm which must be diffused across the organization (Slater and Narver, 2000) for the firm to be successful. These contrasting views present a conundrum for practitioners, as market orientation requires a specific set of skills among managers, as well as a certain degree of respect (and concomitant autonomy) for the marketing function itself within the firm (cf. Auh and Merlo, 2012; Wirtz *et al.*, 2014). Thus, internal marketing activities (cf. Kotler and Keller, 2011), which involve decentralizing the marketing role and making a customer focus part of the training and hiring process for everyone in the firm, might actually diminish the capability of firms to implement market strategy. In particular, the diffusion of the marketing role would undermine the selection of personnel whose KSAOs (knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics) were more oriented to performing the marketing role more effectively. If managers lack these capabilities, firms might actually be moving toward an overall managerial and marketing approach which is suboptimal or even counterproductive from a human resource allocation perspective. In short, the broader implications of this diffusion of marketing activity (e.g. Wyner, 2008) on marketing managers themselves have been relatively ignored.

There is considerable turnover among higher level marketing managers, indicating that marketing responsibilities and how they are distributed can impact employee satisfaction and retention (e.g. McCole, 2004; Wirtz *et al.*, 2014). Research from the personnel psychology literature suggests that factors such as personality traits are part of the problem. Specifically, person-environment (P-E) fit theory (Holland, 1996) argues that individuals gravitate toward, and flourish within, career fields that are suited to their personalities. When there is a strong fit between personality and career, individuals are more satisfied with the type of work they do and they perform better on the job. However, individuals who do not possess good fit with their careers are much more likely to leave, and even if they perform well, they are less satisfied with the work that they do. For example, Ulaga and Loveland (2014) found that salespeople who were satisfied with the sales profession had a consistently different personality profile compared to those who were career dissatisfied. In a similar vein, individuals whose personality characteristics are not suited to the work that they must perform will have difficulty adapting to changes.

Thus, personality and career satisfaction data can provide important insights as to the longer-term effects of marketing's diffusion on both managers and firms. While not explicitly stated, the marketing orientation literature is nonetheless predicated on the assumption that there are no differences in personality-based drivers of career satisfaction between marketing and non-marketing managers that find themselves engaging in marketing activities. Or, at the very least, training and acculturation should remedy these problems. If this is the case, then we should expect personality factors to have similar relationships with career satisfaction for marketers and non-marketers alike, supporting the notion that the diffusion of marketing activities throughout the organization will have little impact on job performance and turnover.

However, if differences do exist along important personality dimensions and on personality/career satisfaction relationships, adding marketing responsibilities to the jobs of non-marketers could undermine performance and increase turnover. More importantly, it would represent a significant loss of both human resource capacity and the loss of the capability to effectively perform the tasks central to marketing. Investigating the personality and career satisfaction relationship therefore provides important insights into the consequences of taking a discrete versus diffused approach to marketing within the firm. This would also provide insights into how the marketing function is viewed within the firm, as perceived organizational support and career opportunity have been shown to impact career satisfaction (Kraimer *et al.*, 2011).

Finally, the relationship between personality and career satisfaction provides what is tantamount to an employee-centric view of the marketing function. Personality provides clues as to who chooses to enter marketing, and the personality/satisfaction relationship provides insight into how important these traits are for intrinsic job success. To date, research has tended to focus on the marketing function in terms of the work performed by marketers rather than the people performing marketing functions (e.g. Gok and Hacıoglu, 2010). This approach relies on human resource managers to determine the role of marketing, and it also shifts the focus from the type of person performing the marketing role. Personality among marketing professionals can thus help identify core competencies which enable these professionals to perform marketing functions more proficiently than their peers. Moreover, this information is important from an academic standpoint, in that it presents scholars with potential insights into how the marketing function is delivered by those in the field.

Taken together, there are several important research questions that emerge: First, do marketers differ from non-marketers along important personality traits. Second, do these traits impact career satisfaction differently across these groups? And, if so, do these differences relate to the critical tasks associated with market orientation? In addressing these questions, we make the following contributions to marketing theory and practice. First, we provide evidence that marketing managers possess theoretically important differentiating attributes from non-marketing managers. Second, we find that the marketing function attracts individuals whose personality profiles are entirely consistent with the key tasks of marketing orientation, but which contravenes somewhat the idea that marketing is better diffused across the organization. This enhances and qualifies our understanding of extant marketing theories and of career development. Finally, the method employed in this paper provides a novel approach that can be used to assess the human resource capabilities of organizations to perform the market function.

To address our research questions, we examine personality traits and career satisfaction among 465 marketing managers along with a normative sample of 3,100 professionals in other fields. This paper is organized as follows: we examine the role of marketing in the firm, focussing in particular on market orientation, suggesting personality traits that are logically related to performance of tasks related to this orientation. Then, we briefly review the literature linking personality traits to different job outcomes. Next, we present our results, comparing personality traits of 465 marketing managers with the sample of 3,100 non-marketing managers in other fields, and examining how these traits differ across the two groups in their relationships with career satisfaction. Finally, we discuss the implications of these results in detail, noting implications for managers, academics, and future researchers.

2. Key marketing capabilities and proposed personality linkages

Although many marketing functions have been diffused across the organization, traditionally marketing managers have been tasked with developing the marketing mix, enacting the marketing concept, and keeping customers satisfied (Kotler and Keller, 2011). The focus on customer-related skills is particularly prominent, ranging from fostering relationships with customers (both B2B and B2C) to leveraging customer knowledge to develop new and unique offerings for customers. These skills should allow the firm to develop cross-functional synergies that provide a competitive advantage (Slater and Narver, 2000; Yang *et al.*, 2012). In this vein, Gok and Hacıoglu (2010) have argued that the modern marketing function encompasses: internal/external network management, knowledge generation and management, CRM, and marketing productivity and performance management.

Consistent with this logic, the paradigm of market orientation (Slater and Narver, 2000) features prominently in the marketing and managerial literatures and encompasses all key areas of marketing responsibilities noted by other researchers (e.g. Gnizy and Shoham, 2014; Gok and Hacıoglu, 2010; Webster *et al.*, 2005). The concepts espoused by market orientation also have academic relevance, with over 5,013 references in the research literature (ABI Inform search, 24 January, 2014), which is especially striking considering the relatively short time this construct has existed in the literature. Given the prominence of market orientation throughout the literature and in practice, it is also likely that the job characteristics and personality traits linkages inferred from market orientation are generalizable across firms. Market orientation thus provides a comprehensive platform from which to conceptually link job characteristics to personality traits.

2.1 Market orientation

Market orientation consists of a combination of customer orientation, understanding the capabilities and strategies of current and potential competitors, and inter-functional coordination of company resources in order to create superior value for the customer (Slater and Narver, 2000). In a meta-analysis, Kirca *et al.* (2005) reveal that market orientation affects performance through innovativeness, customer loyalty, and quality. In addition, those firms with a strong marketing orientation tend to perform better than firms that employ other strategic orientations (Noble *et al.*, 2002) because they are able to better meet the needs of current customers and are able to better anticipate the needs of the marketplace than competitors. Moreover, market orientation positively impacts various performance outcomes such as customer value (Paladino, 2007). These firms are thus able to leverage their market orientation into a competitive advantage by mobilizing customer intelligence to develop innovative new products or to effectively meet customer needs (Mahr *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, Kumar *et al.* (2011) provide empirical evidence showing that the earlier a company adopts a market orientation, the greater the likelihood that it will be able to sustain its advantage in business performance. Market orientation thus provides a true strategic resource for firms that adopt it, but it also implies that personnel within those firms must have skills and attributes which separate them from their peers.

For example, the literature finds that marketing managers should have a strong customer orientation and should have the sensitivity to address concerns from customers quickly (Homburg *et al.*, 2009) while also being vigilant in identifying threats from competitors. They should also be able to direct their extraverted and teamwork-oriented dispositions toward building relationships with their peers in different areas of the

company. In addition, they should possess the assertiveness necessary to communicate and stand up for the importance of their proposals to guide their firms toward more market oriented, competitively advantageous undertakings. Marketers should also possess higher levels of visionary focus, allowing for a focus on the “big picture” (cf. Paladino, 2007; Kirca *et al.*, 2005). They should also be able to take an unconventional or innovative approach to problems. This desire to examine non-traditional options should be associated with a willingness to challenge how “things are done” relative to peers from other departments. By the same token, marketing managers should be more open to new approaches and be more adaptive, willing to learn, and prepared to approach problems more creatively. Finally, being optimistic should also be more important for the job success of marketing personnel, as they must help the company move in new, and potentially risky, directions but have faith that their endeavors will succeed.

2.2 Personality and job outcomes

Personality has long been used to predict job performance in a variety of career fields, in large part because several decades of meta-analytic research has consistently provided strong support for the assertion that personality dimensions predict intrinsic and extrinsic job success (c.f., Ones *et al.*, 2007; Judge *et al.*, 2002). Two important implications emerge from this research stream: first, traits that are essential to success in one field might not be predictive of success in a different career field, and second, because similar career fields share similar personality/outcome relationships, occupations are shaped and defined by the characteristics that are shared across different work settings. Thus, identifying key personality dimensions that are related to success in a given field provides important insights into what demands are being placed upon its members. Consequently, personality provides an effective platform from which to evaluate and guide the career development of those who seek to enter the marketing field and provides unique insights into how marketing managers are different from their peers in other industries. More importantly, the relationships between personality and career satisfaction can provide insights into how the diffusion of marketing tasks across organizations may differentially impact non-marketing managers who find themselves performing marketing-related tasks.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Participants were working adults across different firms who voluntarily completed a personality assessment as part of career planning and development programs offered by their respective organizations. Assessments were administered by the career development firm eCareerFit.com. The data were collected between June 2012 and January 2014 from a wide range of firms throughout the USA. Participants voluntarily completed the surveys as a part of career planning services offered by their respective firms, with the knowledge that their personal information was not being shared with their employers but that general information, such as gender, age, occupation, and personality characteristics would be used in academic research. Participants were further given detailed assessments of their respective weaknesses and strengths along key personality dimensions relative to others in their fields. This feedback was provided to ensure that respondents would provide honest information about their satisfaction with their current job as well as their overall career. Owing to confidentiality considerations, the identities of the companies where individuals worked were not

available. Moreover, the data gathering was supervised by two licensed psychologists who also developed the survey instruments. These licensed psychologists provided guidance for eCareerFit throughout the process, thus ensuring that each respondent's confidentiality and personal information would be protected. Combined with the anonymity of the firms participating in this study, there is no means to identify either individual respondents or firms.

The marketing sample was comprised of 465 marketing managers across a variety of firms within the USA, while the general sample was drawn from a random sample of 3,100 managers and non-managers, also working in the USA, who completed the survey around the same period. The marketing sample was 30.3 percent female; 8.4 percent were between 20 and 30 years-old, 28.8 percent were between 31 and 40, 39.2 percent were between 41 and 50, 21.7 percent were between 51 and 60, and the remaining 1.8 percent were 61 or over. Among the general worker sample, 56.5 percent of the respondents were female and 43.5 percent male; 8.4 percent were between 20 and 30, 37.1 percent were between 31 and 40, 35.3 percent were between 41 and 50, 17.5 percent were between 51 and 60, and the remaining 1.8 percent were 61 or over. The sample characteristics are provided in Table I.

3.2 Measures

The 13 personality measures used in this data source were developed as part of a larger work-based personality inventory which has been in use for over a decade (see Lounsbury and Gibson, 2013, for the most recent version of the technical report) and which has been extensively validated in both academic and professional settings, having been administered to over six million individuals for both personnel decisions and career development. The constructs used in this study were: career satisfaction; the Five-Factor Model traits of extraversion, emotional stability, conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness; and the more narrow personality traits of customer service orientation, visionary leadership, optimism, intrinsic motivation, image management, assertiveness, tough-mindedness, work drive. A brief description of each scale is included in the Appendix. Scale reliabilities, means, standard deviations, and correlations with career satisfaction are included as Table II.

Note that we limit our discussion of results to those dimensions which provide clues about the work characteristics of marketing managers based on either a significant and noteworthy difference along important traits, or on significant differences in their correlational relationships with career satisfaction. A similar approach to examining personality characteristics of marketing personnel has been suggested by Ulaga and Loveland (2014), whereby judgment is applied based on whether or not the relationships appear important, noteworthy, or potentially counterintuitive (Tuli *et al.*, 2007). Given the sample size, some traits which were significantly different were not meaningfully different in terms of either scope (from a selection perspective) or in terms of implications for managerial practice (from the perspective of the marketing literature on the characteristics of the marketing function).

Table I.
Sample characteristics

	n	Gender		Age range %				
		% Male	% Female	20-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+
Marketing managers	465	69.7	30.3	8.4	28.8	39.2	21.7	1.8
General sample	3,100	43.5	56.5	8.4	37.1	35.3	17.5	1.8

Dimension	Marketing managers		Overall sample		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>M</i>	SD	
Conscientiousness	3.17	0.73	3.40	0.72	-6.41*
Emotional stability	3.32	0.75	3.45	0.74	-3.53*
Extraversion	3.88	0.77	3.75	0.79	3.32*
Openness	3.88	0.65	3.77	0.70	3.19*
Assertiveness	3.72	0.78	3.51	0.86	4.97*
Image management	2.73	0.77	2.54	0.81	4.87*
Intrinsic motivation	3.43	0.83	3.58	0.80	-3.58*
Optimism	3.82	0.73	3.81	0.80	0.25
Tough-mindedness	2.98	0.72	3.11	0.83	-3.20*
Work drive	3.51	0.79	3.34	0.79	4.32*
Visionary leadership	3.25	0.81	2.87	0.75	10.08*
Customer orientation	4.30	0.53	4.27	0.55	1.10

Note: * $p < 0.05$

Table II.
Means and *t*-tests for personality traits of marketing and overall sample

4. Results

Results were assessed first using *t*-tests comparing the means for marketing managers with those of the general non-marketing sample. These results are included in Table II. To identify those dimensions which were related to substantive differences between marketing and other occupations, we examined the correlations for each of the personality dimensions with career satisfaction among each of the two samples. Next, we compared the correlations for each of the two samples to examine if there were significant differences across the two groups using Fisher's *r* to *z* transformation. These results, displayed in Table III, showed significant correlational differences along the traits of conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion, openness to experience, assertiveness, optimism, visionary leadership, and customer service orientation with career satisfaction. We also performed a series of parallel analyses for males vs females and did not find any significant gender differences ($p < 0.10$ in order to correct for the statistical tests conducted). In addition, to uncover any issues of non-normality or other potential sources of bias, we conducted a multi-sample bootstrapping procedure

Dimension	α	Marketing sample	General sample	Correlation comparison
Teamwork	0.84	0.162*	0.154*	ns
Conscientiousness	0.84	0.033	0.146*	-2.29 ($p = 0.01$)
Emotional stability	0.86	0.428*	0.278*	3.45 ($p = 0.00$)
Extroversion	0.83	0.313*	0.213*	2.16 ($p = 0.015$)
Openness	0.80	0.131*	0.031	2.02 ($p = 0.022$)
Assertiveness	0.82	0.268*	0.127*	2.95 ($p = 0.00$)
Image management	0.76	-0.075	-0.122*	ns
Intrinsic motivation	0.80	0.049	0.083	ns
Optimism	0.85	0.433*	0.212*	4.98 ($p = 0.00$)
Tough-mindedness	0.78	0.015	0.034	ns
Work drive	0.81	0.183*	0.126*	ns
Visionary leadership	0.78	0.152*	-0.050	4.07 ($p = 0.00$)
Customer orientation	0.77	0.259*	0.131*	2.67 ($p = 0.00$)

Note: * $p < 0.05$

Table III.
Reliability and comparison of correlations between traits and career satisfaction

(Manly, 1997) with 1,000 resamples using identical sample sizes of 465 for both the Marketing Managers group and the general employment sample.

4.1 Customer service orientation

Given the centrality of the customer to the marketing function, it is somewhat surprising that marketing personnel do not differ significantly from non-marketing personnel in terms of their overall customer service orientation, $t(3,563) = 1.10, p > 0.05$. One potential explanation for this lack of a difference might be that the successful diffusion of the marketing concept within firms (Webster *et al.*, 2005) has increased awareness of the importance of customer satisfaction among all personnel. This could also reflect an increasing focus on internal customers. Given the centrality of being connected to the customer for implementing a market orientation, this is a competency that marketing should espouse to a greater degree than other divisions of the firm. However, the correlation between career satisfaction and customer service orientation was significantly higher for the marketing sample than for the overall sample, $z = 2.67, p < 0.01$. This supports previous research (Zablah *et al.*, 2012) and suggests that, despite the diffusion of this area of marketing competence, customer service orientation is more important for the day to day job activities of marketing managers than for individuals in other fields. This finding underscores the centrality of understanding and serving the customer, which is a key component of market orientation. This might also reflect that serving customers is part of what attracts individuals to marketing, and that marketing managers find such work a more satisfying component of their jobs than do individuals who are drawn to non-marketing fields.

4.2 Openness to experience

This trait is related to being more willing to try new things, to being more intellectually curious, and to being open to new ideas. For most occupational fields, openness is not related to job performance or to job satisfaction (cf., Judge *et al.*, 2002), and so our significant results, demonstrating that levels of openness to experience are higher for marketing managers than those in other fields, $t(3,563) = 3.19, p < 0.05$, represent an important finding. Perhaps more interestingly for this setting, openness is also related to intelligence, creativity, and divergent thinking (McCrae, 1987). Given that offering more creative and innovative products requires managers to be willing to venture into completely new product and customer domains, these marketing managers should be higher in openness to experience than those in non-marketing fields. There is also a significant correlation between openness to experience and career satisfaction for the marketing sample ($r(463) = 0.131, p < 0.05$), and this relationship is significantly different from the correlation for the overall sample ($z = 2.02, p < 0.05$). While this trait may be less relevant for managers outside of marketing, openness to experience is necessary to carry out the marketing concept and to take advantage of opportunities that arise in the marketplace. These findings suggest that marketing managers differ from non-marketers in this key competency needed for a market orientation.

4.3 Visionary leadership

Having the capacity to innovate and approach problems with an emphasis on emergent strategic opportunities is a key building block for a market orientation (Slater and Narver, 2000). Visionary leadership has also been shown to be one of the key cultural aspects of the highest caliber organizations (Westley and Mintzberg, 1989). Our results

show that it is a trait that is possessed to a greater degree by marketing managers than by individuals in other domains, $t(3,563) = 10.08, p < 0.01$. Given that developing innovativeness and creativity are important for a market orientation and for gaining credibility in the boardroom, this is an important finding. The higher correlation between career satisfaction and visionary leadership ($z = 4.07, p < 0.01$) suggests that marketing managers have a greater inclination toward moving their firms forward and the “big picture” orientation necessary to fulfill the marketing concept.

4.4 *Conscientiousness*

This trait is related to a propensity to be motivated toward creating order, having a strong sense of reliability, and having a stronger preference for structure and predictability (Roberts *et al.*, 2005). Individuals high in conscientiousness are dispositionally ill-suited to the creative, flexible, and non-routine problem solving associated with developing new products, originating innovative promotion strategies, and envisioning how potential consumers might respond to unconventional marketing activities. Thus, it comes as no surprise that marketing managers are lower in conscientiousness than their non-marketing peers in other fields, $t(3,563) = -6.41, p < 0.01$. Furthermore, the correlation between conscientiousness and career satisfaction is significantly higher for the general sample than for our marketing professional sample, $z = -2.29, p < 0.01$. Additionally, there was no relationship between career satisfaction and conscientiousness for our marketing sample, lending additional support for the assertion that lower levels of conscientiousness, compared to other individuals in the organization, are adaptive for marketing managers, and that individuals in marketing have a predisposition to focus more of their attention on thinking creatively and outside-the-box rather than following pre-determined procedures and established policies. Given the lack of a clear definition of the marketing role that results from diffusing marketing responsibilities across the firm, conscientious individuals would find it difficult to be satisfied or to perform well in an environment with so little structure.

4.5 *Emotional stability*

Having a high degree of emotional resilience has been shown to be related to successful job performance and to higher levels of job satisfaction in a variety of fields (Ones *et al.*, 2007). Interestingly, the marketing managers in our sample actually had lower levels of emotional stability, $t(3,563) = -3.52, p < 0.01$, than the general sample. The emotional stability and career satisfaction correlation was actually higher for the marketing managers than for the general sample, $z = 3.45, p < 0.01$. This increased sensitivity makes marketing managers more responsive to potential threats than their non-marketing peers, more attuned to emerging problems in terms of relationships with customers, and perhaps more aware of changes occurring in the competitive environment. At the same time, given the higher levels of both optimism and visionary leadership among marketing managers relative to non-marketers, our data support the idea that marketing’s focus on competitors and the customer makes them more attuned and sensitive to potential threats, but also more likely to strategically address these concerns with viable alternatives. Conversely, the higher correlation between emotional stability and career satisfaction for marketers highlights the importance of having the ability to resist responding emotionally to problems, and to keep focussed on finding solutions rather than simply pointing out potential threats in the environment.

4.6 *Extraversion*

This trait is associated with being more sociable and desiring higher levels of excitement as well as projecting interpersonal warmth (Costa and McCrae, 1995).

Given that the customer/inter-functional coordination activities of marketing orientation require making new contacts and forging new customer relationships, interacting closely with existing customers, and making persuasive presentations of ideas to different parts of the organization, it is understandable that marketing managers are higher in extraversion, $t(3,563) = 3.31, p < 0.05$. Perhaps owing to the lack of clear authority over other departments, marketing managers must engage customers both internally and externally to complete initiatives and to maintain relationships. Furthermore, the correlation between career satisfaction and extraversion is also significantly higher for the marketing sample than for the overall sample ($z = 2.16, p < 0.05$), bolstering the proposed importance of extraversion for successful job performance.

4.7 Assertiveness

This trait centers on the tendency to stand up for and defend one's beliefs and to speak up on important matters. Considering the diminishing prominence of marketing (Verhoef and Leeflang, 2009), the need to convince fellow non-marketing managers that a potential threat warrants action, and the competition for resources that occurs within firms, it is not surprising that the marketing sample was higher in assertiveness than that of the general sample, $t(3,563) = 4.97, p < 0.01$. The inter-functional coordination of a market orientation requires that marketers persuade other departments why their ideas are important and warrant collective action. Thus, there is a degree of intramural selling that marketers must engage in to develop effective market mixes. Marketing managers who cannot stand up and defend their ideas, or who cannot convince management that things should be done differently, will likely not perform well in the marketing role. Consistent with this, the correlation between assertiveness and career satisfaction was also higher for the marketing sample than for the general sample, $z = 2.95, p < 0.01$.

4.8 Optimism

This trait reflects the tendency to have a positive, hopeful outlook concerning people, prospects, and the future and has been shown to predict a broad array of important life outcomes, such as work success (Seligman, 1990). Optimistic individuals tend to perceive their failures as having been caused by factors that are both temporary and more likely to be controllable in the future (Seligman, 1990), and individuals higher in optimism are more likely to make internal attributions. Moreover, individuals high in optimism also tend to have more of a learning orientation than their less optimistic peers – they tend to look at failures as learning opportunities for future success, and they attempt to find a cause for their failures (Carver *et al.*, 2010). These are characteristics closely identified with a marketing orientation. Marketing managers show a stronger relationship between optimism and career satisfaction than non-marketing managers ($z = 4.98, p < 0.01$). However, marketing managers do not possess this trait to a greater degree than their peers, $t(3,563) = 0.254, p > 0.05$, which suggests that this is not necessarily a core marketing competency *per se*. Instead, it is a trait shared by non-marketers, although it does not contribute to their career satisfaction to the same degree.

5. Conclusions and managerial implications

Firms operate in a competitive environment in which they actively attempt to recruit, interview, and hire employees whether inside or outside of marketing that score highly

on all desirable characteristics. Furthermore, firms use performance evaluation processes to weed out existing employees that prove to lack desirable traits. Combined, hiring and termination processes serve to minimize potential differences between marketers and non-marketers even in large samples (e.g. O'Boyle and Agunis, 2011). The differences revealed in this research are therefore remarkable and provide the basis for firms to realize economic benefits via improved selection and training of marketers (cf. Gatewood *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, the differences provide important insights into the impact that attempts to diffuse marketing functions across the organization can have.

The foremost challenge for marketing to secure its rightful place, based on the established superiority of market orientation over other organizational strategies, is to attract a workforce that possesses skills and capabilities that are distinct, unique, and allow them to perform important organizational tasks better than anyone else could. As Verhoef and Leeflang (2009) note, the marketing department's influence within the firm is positively related to market orientation, which in turn is positively related to firm performance. Likewise, organizational effort in the human resources area, supported by the marketing function and implemented through an internal market orientation, is connected with increasing service quality and innovation success (Sanchez-Hernandez and Miranda, 2011). Understanding how marketing personnel are different from their peers is an important first step in this direction.

Overall, our findings support the assertion that marketing managers do possess key attributes that distinguish them from their non-marketing peers. In particular, the importance of customer orientation, visionary leadership, assertiveness, and optimism for career satisfaction all point to the role of marketers as working within and outside the organization to keep customers satisfied and to move the organization toward more responsive and innovative objectives. In addition, our data strongly suggest that dispositional traits, and the concomitant soft-skills that arise from these traits, are important to long-term success in marketing. If individuals do not possess the inclination and the disposition to do a particular type of work as is the case for non-marketers in this study, then training non-marketers to perform marketing functions will only, at best, prolong the inevitable drop in career satisfaction. Moreover, diffusing this work across the organization, may also lead to dissatisfaction among those with the strongest inclination for the work of marketing. The result is a lose-lose situation for both marketers and non-marketers.

These findings run somewhat counter to the suggestions being made by some that the marketing function or role should be diffused across the organization. While a very cogent case has been made that marketing is everyone's job (e.g. Webster *et al.*, 2005), it seems that there are still those who are more capable at it than others. Ironically, the influence and success of the marketing department represent a sort of chicken-or-egg dilemma, as the success of marketing is ultimately what earns it a voice among executives (O'Sullivan and Abela, 2010; Park *et al.*, 2012), while at the same time, the leverage points for marketing orientation are inter-functional in nature (Harris *et al.*, 2008). Thus, marketing must simultaneously show its worth along important metrics across the firm while still providing a clear contribution to firm performance (Park *et al.*, 2012). The argument has also been made that a firm with a market orientation should have a strong learning orientation and should share responsibility for understanding the customer and aligning action across different business units in order to meet customer needs (Slater and Narver, 2000). We would temper this reasoning with the caveat that a market-oriented approach does not preclude allowing marketing to

exist as a separate business unit. Instead, we would argue that marketers must make it clear that their role is central to the organization's success, and that there is always a need for everyone in the firm to contribute to the task of marketing.

At the same time, the core tasks of marketing in general, and market-oriented strategies in particular, still represent key strategic functions whose work, no matter how diffused, still should be centered around those who possess the right attributes to perform them. While we do not have data on the individual firms in this study, we can assume that the marketing function was under assault in many of them as this is well reported in the literature. The fact that there were significant differences in both means and correlations for several key marketing-related traits suggests that the core work of marketers is still markedly different from the work done by others within the firm. This suggests that even if the stated role of marketing is somewhat nebulous, the actual work seems to be highly rooted in those tasks commensurate with a market orientation.

For firms considering a more diffused approach, our findings suggest caution. Examining the performance of firms that have diffused marketing responsibilities across the organization may be misleading for those firms who have not made the transition. Firms that have already made the transition or were founded with a diffused approach will have already established P-E fit for employees outside of marketing through either hiring or other practices. Thus, their performance may hide costs associated with adopting this approach because they will likely lack the ability to retain those people who possess the core skills related to intrinsic job success in marketing. In contrast, firms who have not made this transition risk reductions in job satisfaction and hence impaired performance and elevated turnover until a similar fit is achieved.

At a minimum, firms contemplating a shift to a diffused approach to marketing should conduct an assessment of P-E fit similar to that illustrated in this paper in order to assess the potential risks and costs. If a given firm's employees within and outside of marketing do not show the differences documented here, the firm can expect to reap the benefits documented in the literature with such diffused approaches. If a firm chooses to proceed, hiring practices should be adjusted across the organization to focus on recruiting new employees who possess a strong P-E fit with a diffused approach. This will facilitate the transition in marketing strategy and reduce the costs associated with employee performance and turnover. Thus, successfully adopting an alternative approach to marketing within the firm may also require adopting alternative approaches to hiring and retention. It is noteworthy that firms such as Ritz-Carlton have already integrated these considerations into their hiring practices, focussing on hiring employees who possess these characteristics regardless of their position. Finally, we would argue that while there have been calls to reorient marketing instruction toward marketing practice (e.g. McCole, 2004), marketing education also seems to reflect job functions which are important to those who choose to be marketers. Allowing the erosion of these core functions by changing marketing education or by allowing the domain to be co-opted by other functions would thus only serve to diminish the effectiveness of marketing.

5.1 Limitations and suggestions for future research

One limitation of this study was that we were unable to gather more data about the work histories of the individuals in our sample. To our knowledge, no research has examined the career progression of individuals across longer time frames and over several different jobs. Given that marketing seems to be an especially turbulent field,

studies that explored career satisfaction over time would be especially useful in helping to further our understanding of what career means to individuals and would also provide insight into how marketing academics should adapt the curriculum and pedagogy over time. As marketing seems to lack a clear identity (Bennett, 2011), research that attempts to further understand how marketing practitioners themselves drive the theory and practice of marketing would provide interesting avenues for future research that could strengthen both the identity of marketing and the degree of relevance it enjoys in business practice.

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Further reading

- Wenzel, D., Natter, M. and Leeflang, S.H. (2013), "Improving marketing's contribution to new product development", *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 298-315.

Appendix

Dimension	Description
Agreeableness	The propensity to work well in a team environment, and to work cooperatively in a work group (7 items)
Conscientiousness	The tendency to be reliable, organized, and rule-following (9 items)
Emotional stability	The overall level of adjustment and emotional resilience in the face of job stress and pressure (6 items)
Extraversion	Disposition to be sociable, gregarious, warm-hearted, and talkative (7 items)
Openness	The propensity to seek out change, innovation, and new experience (9 items)
Assertiveness	A person's ability to assert him/herself, to take charge of situations, to speak up on matters of importance, and to defend personal beliefs (8 items)
Image management	Tendency to monitor, observe, regulate, and control how one presents oneself, and to carefully regulate the image one projects in work interactions (6 items)
Intrinsic motivation	A disposition to be more focussed on the pleasure associated with work itself rather than on the financial rewards of work. Interested in the challenge, meaning, autonomy, variety, and significance of work (6 items)
Optimism	Having an upbeat and hopeful outlook concerning people, prospects, and the future; the tendency to minimize the focus on problems, even in the face of setbacks and adversity (6 items)
Tough-mindedness	Appraising information and making work-related decisions based on logic, facts, and data, rather than feelings, values or intuition (8 items)
Work drive	Disposition to work long hours, to invest more time and energy into job and career, and motivated to do whatever it takes to complete projects, meet deadlines, and achieve job success (8 items)
Visionary leadership	A leadership style that emphasizes achieving an ambitious organizational vision and mission; focussed on developing a strong corporate strategy, and planning for future contingencies (8 items)
Customer orientation	Desire to provide personalized, responsive, and high-caliber service to customers, putting the customer first, wanting to keep customers satisfied – even if it means going above and beyond normal job requirements (8 items)
Career satisfaction	Satisfaction with one's chosen career path, pleased with the opportunities and experiences associated with one's profession (5 items)

Table A1.
Listing of traits and their descriptions

About the authors

Dr James M. Loveland has a PhD in Psychology from the University of Tennessee and a PhD in Marketing from the W.P. Carey School of Business at the Arizona State University. His work has appeared in *Journal of Career Assessment*, *Journal of Education and Work*, and *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, among others. Dr James M. Loveland is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: lovelandj1@xavier.edu

Dr Scott A. Thompson has a PhD in Marketing from the W.P. Carey School of Business at the Arizona State University. His work has appeared in *Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of Interactive Marketing*.

Dr John W. Lounsbury has a PhD in Psychology from Michigan State University. His work has appeared in *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Career Assessment*, and *Personnel Psychology*, among others.

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