

Sales success through market and entrepreneurial orientation

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The aim of this study is to provide deeper insight into the differences in the level of market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation especially among small and medium sized enterprises (SME's). The data was collected from 77 SME managers across Australia. The results indicate that there are significant differences in aggregate market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation between the more effective SME's (leaders) and the less effective SMEs (laggards). This study contributes towards sales knowledge by examining and highlighting the importance of market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation to sales organisation effectiveness in Australia SME's.

Introduction

The sales function becomes a dynamic source of value creation and innovation within the firm that operates in a turbulent business environment (Ingram 2004). Despite the growth in sales management research, it is still in an early stage; especially in developing the variables of salesforce performance and sales organisation effectiveness (Ingram 2004). This study includes market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation in the model of sales organisation effectiveness. It should be noted that this study also includes the dimensions of management control and salesforce characteristics and their impact on the sales performance and sales organisation effectiveness within SME's.

The importance of market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation on business performance has been widely recognised in the literature (e.g. Slater and Narver 1995, Matsuno et al. 2002, Slater and Narver 2000). Slater and Narver (1995) argue that market orientation without an entrepreneurial spirit might only focus of the organisation's effort on a narrow perspective. Further, according to Kohli and Jaworski (1990), and Slater and Narver (2000) market orientation focusing on understanding latent needs is inherently entrepreneurial. In the Slater and Narver's (1995) study, the concepts of entrepreneurship, market orientation, and organisational learning are integrated into a model. They suggest that "market orientation and entrepreneurial spirit provide the cultural foundation for organisational learning" (Slater and Narver 1995, p.63). In addition, the study of Matsuno et al. (2002) highlights the view that entrepreneurial proclivity has a positive, direct and indirect relationship on market orientation.

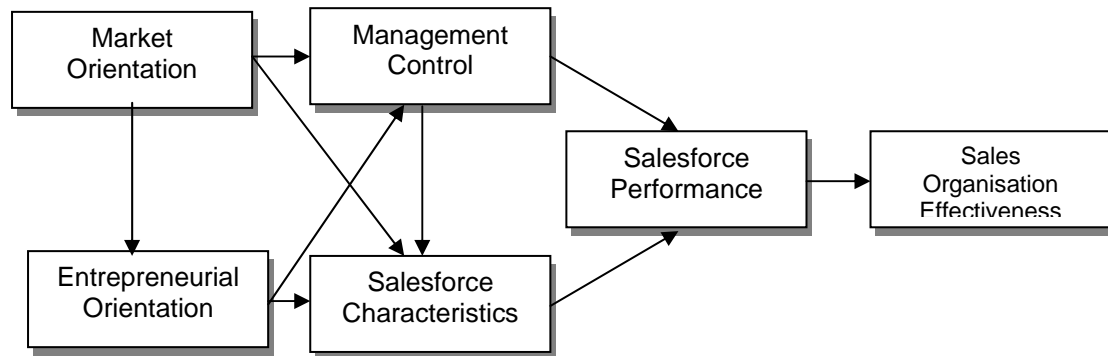
As suggested by Slater and Narver (2000) the relationship between entrepreneurship and market orientation is an important area for further research. Most of the previous studies in this area were conducted in larger organisation. This research is focused on sales performance in small and medium sized enterprises (SME's). This study examines sales organisation effectiveness by classifying responses as leaders (the most effective companies) and laggards (the least effective companies). The study aims to examine differences in the level of all dimensions of sales organisation effectiveness; specifically market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation between the leaders and laggards.

Theoretical Background

This paper is based on the framework as shown in Figure 1. This framework was developed from previous studies (see Grant et al. 2006a) in which the relationships among variables

were investigated (Grant et al. 2006a; 2006b). The results suggest that market orientation has a strong direct relationship with management control and salesforce characteristics; and indirectly related to salesforce performance and sales organisation effectiveness. However, entrepreneurial orientation was not found to be an important driver of salesforce performance and sales organisation effectiveness.

Figure 1: The Conceptual Model



Market Orientation

The basic concept of market orientation focuses on understanding the expressed current and future customers' needs (Jaworski and Kohli 1993; Narver and Slater 1990). Slater (2001) states that the market-oriented organisations are those organisations which are committed to understanding both the expressed and unexpressed needs of customers; this is termed the second generation of market orientation. Narver et al. (2004) suggest the concept of total market orientation includes both responsive and proactive market orientation. The power of a proactive market orientation is that the organisation continuously discovers new opportunities for target-customers. Total market orientation is assumed to be adequate for the organisation that is facing a dynamic market or competitive environment since it will build the strongest foundation of sustainable competitive advantage (Narver et al. 2004). This study adopts the total market orientation concept suggested by Narver et al. (2004) which contains responsive and proactive market orientation. Specifically the components of market orientation in this study are: customer orientation and latent need fulfilment, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination.

Entrepreneurial Orientation

Entrepreneurship is imperative for organisational survival, profitability, growth, and renewal (Zahra 1996). Echols and Neck (1998) suggest that an organisational member can be entrepreneurial and an organisation can have an entrepreneurial structure, each of which complements the other to provide synergy. This implies that the more the organisation can exhibit entrepreneurial properties/qualities, the more its people can behave entrepreneurially. External factors such as fast movement in customers' needs and hyper competition have compelled organisations to develop the entrepreneurial spirit in organisations. Entrepreneurship involves the development of independent units designed to create, market, and expand innovative services, technologies, or methods within the organisation (Cunningham and Lischeron 1991). Stevenson and Jarillo (1990) point out that the growing importance of entrepreneurship is imposed by an organisation's need to have flexible structure and growth so as to compete successfully in turbulent environments. This implies that organisations need to build the entrepreneurship spirit of a small organisation and blend it into the culture of a larger organisation. In this study entrepreneurial orientation is defined as a process of enhancement of wealth through innovation and exploitation of opportunities, which requires the entrepreneurial characteristics of risk taking propensity, autonomy, and proactiveness.

Management Control

A salesforce control system is defined as “an organisation’s set of procedures for monitoring, directing, evaluating, and compensating its employees” (Anderson and Oliver 1987, p.76). Alternatively, Jaworski (1988) defines control as “attempts by managers and other stakeholders within the strategic business unit to influence the behaviour and activities of marketing personnel to achieve desired outcomes” (p.58). This study adopts measurements taken from the Anderson and Oliver (1987) approach, which is more behavioural centred compared to the Jaworski (1988) methodology, which tends to centre a traditional financial type measures.

Salesforce Characteristics

The salesforce characteristics construct represents specific characteristics of salespeople in organisations. According to Cravens et al. (1993) the salesforce characteristic construct domain includes what salesforce possess and what they do. Therefore, specific salesforce characteristics may be determinants of salesforce performance (Cravens et al. 1993). In this study the salesforce characteristics construct mainly capture the notion of professional competence (possess excellent selling skills), team orientation (cooperate as part of a sales team), recognition motivation, sales support orientation (perform non-selling activities effectively) and planning orientation of salespeople in organisations.

Salesforce Performance

Salesforce performance is defined as an overall evaluation of the salesforce contribution to achieving the organisational goals (Baldauf et al. 2001; Behrman and Perreault 1982; Cravens et al. 1993). Ingram et al. (2004) define salesforce performance as ‘a function of individual salesforce performance in individual situations’ (p.256). Salesforce performance refers to the behaviour and outcomes that are under the control of the salesforce (Babakus et al. 1994). Further, Cravens et al. (1993) conceptualised salesforce performance in terms of three interrelated constructs i.e. salesforce non-selling behavioural performance, salesforce selling behavioural performance, and salesforce outcome performance.

The drivers of salesforce performance can be categorised into individual factors and organisational factors (Grant et al. 2005). The individual factors include salesforce motivation (Babakus et al. 1994), salesforce characteristics (Cravens et al. 1993; Piercy et al. 1999), proactive behaviour (Pitt et al. 2002), and salesforce behavioural performance (Babakus et al. 1996; Baldauf et al. 2001; Cravens et al. 1993; Piercy et al. 1999). The organisational factors consist of the sales management control system (Babakus et al. 1996; Baldauf et al. 2001; Cravens et al. 1993; Piercy et al. 1999), sales territory design (Babakus et al. 1996; Baldauf et al. 2001; Piercy et al. 1999), and business strategic orientation (Baldauf et al. 2001). Previous studies suggest that the individual and organisational factors have significant impact on salesforce performance (Babakus et al. 1996; Baldauf et al. 2001; Cravens et al. 1993; Piercy et al. 1999).

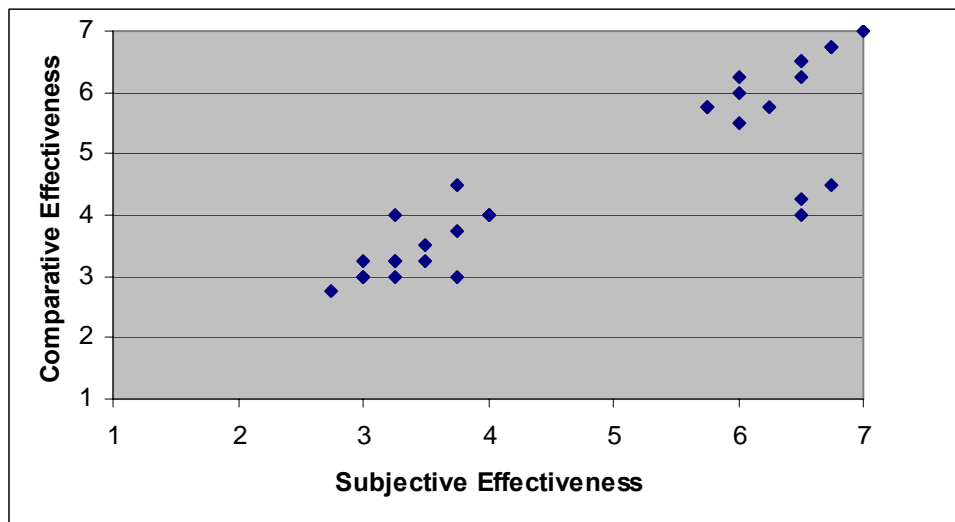
Sales Organisation Effectiveness

Sales organisation effectiveness is defined as ‘a summary evaluation of the overall success of a sales organisation in meeting its goals and objectives in total and at different organisational levels’ (Ingram et al. 2004, p.256). According to Baldauf et al. (2001) sales organisation effectiveness indicates how well the sales organisation has implemented business and marketing strategies. In this sense, sales organisations are closely related to the implementation of marketing strategies that lead to the effectiveness of the sales organisation (Baldauf et al. 2001). Previous studies suggest that salesforce performance leads to sales organisation effectiveness (e.g. Baldauf et al. 2001, Cravens et al. 1993, Piercy et al. 1999).

Organisational effectiveness can be measured by total sales volume, market share, profitability (Babakus et al. 1994, Ingram et al. 2004), return on assets, and residual income (Cravens et al. 1993). Sales organisations are responsible for the implementation of business and marketing strategies which impact on the effectiveness of the sales organisation (Churchill et al. 1993). High performance of the salesforce drives profits, sales growth, and customer satisfaction (Babakus et al., 1994). Based on our previous studies (Grant et al. 1996, 1998, 2004), salesforce performance can be classified into two categories: leaders and laggards.

Two factors that related to this classification are comparative and subjective effectiveness. Figure 2 presents the results from the 77 SME's who participated in the study showing the two-dimensions of sales organisation effectiveness. As shown, the two dimensions of comparative and subjective effectiveness allow for the identification of two categories: leaders and laggards. Leaders are considered to be companies that rated their sales volume, sales growth, profitability and customer satisfaction, and performance of sales organisation to be above or better than their competitors. On the other side, laggards refer to those companies that rated their sales volume, sales growth, profitability and customer satisfaction, and performance of their sales organisation below their competitors.

Figure 2: Sales Organisation Effectiveness: Leaders and Laggards



The differences in sales organisation effectiveness can be related to differences in a number of factors including market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, management control, and salesforce characteristics. Thus, the following hypotheses are postulated:

There are significant differences between leaders and laggards in the level of (H1) market orientation, (H2) entrepreneurial orientation, (H3) management control, (H4) salesforce characteristics, (H5) salesforce performance, and (H6) sales organisation effectiveness.

Research Methodology

Data

The sample for this study was SME managers in charge of the sales function. A mailed survey was employed to obtain the data from SME managers across a wide spectrum of Australian industries. The database was obtained from the Laney Pickett Thomas Customer Directory 2006, plus individual small businesses known to the researchers. Several steps have been taken in determining the participants: firstly, the database was reviewed to short list appropriate SME's. Secondly, each remaining organisation on the list was checked for correct contact details. Finally, each identified potential respondent was contacted to explain the purpose of the research and explore the respondent's willingness to participate. The

questionnaires were distributed to 180 SME's across Australia. In total 77 SME managers participated in this initial study thereby providing a final effective response rate of 41%. Upon analysis of the results we classified leaders as those companies which have superior comparative and subjective effectiveness, and vice versa for laggards. We took the top 20% as companies and classified as leaders, and classified the bottom 20% as laggards; thus the number of leaders and laggards are 15.

Measures

The majority of measures on sales effectiveness used in this study were based on existing scales. The scale of management control, salesforce characteristics, salesforce performance, and sales organisation effectiveness were adopted from the work of Baldauf et al. (2001), Cravens et al. (1993), and Piercy et al. (1999). The scale of market orientation was adopted from Narver and Slater (1990) and Narver et al. (2004). There were no existing measures for entrepreneurial orientation; however, this study adopts a scale of climate for innovation developed by Dorabjee et al. (1998) that includes components of risk taking and freedom; and the work of Venkatraman (1989) was adopted in this study to measure proactiveness. Cronbach alpha, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were used to establish the psychometric properties of the measures. Table 1 shows that all constructs have a coefficient greater than .80, indicating good reliability (Nunnally 1978). In addition, based on the values of χ^2/df , GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA reported in the table, the measures were shown to have acceptable psychometric properties.

Table 1: Summary Statistics of the Measurement Models Analysis

Construct	α	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Market Orientation	.926	1.256	.843	.783	.817	.945	.955	.060
Entrepreneurial Orientation	.806	1.189	.873	.807	.771	.937	.952	.052
Management Control	.936	1.164	.854	.795	.877	.975	.980	.048
Salesforce Characteristics	.926	1.232	.870	.790	.892	.967	.977	.057
Salesforce Performance	.942	1.085	.822	.753	.862	.984	.987	.035
Sales Organisation Effectiveness	.940	1.471	.846	.756	.906	.954	.967	.080

Results and Discussion

The results summarised in Table 2 support the hypotheses and our expectation that the means of market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, management control, salesforce characteristics, salesforce performance, and sales organisation effectiveness from leaders are superior compared to those of laggards. Amongst the drivers of salesforce performance, the level of market orientation appears to be the most significant difference between leaders and laggards.

Table 2 Leaders versus Laggards

Variables	Hypothesis	Means		t-test	
		Leaders N=15	Laggards N=15		
Market orientation	IV	H1	5.8133	4.4567	4.597***
Entrepreneurial orientation	IV	H2	5.8410	5.2359	2.711**
Management control	IV	H3	5.1900	3.6300	3.869**
Salesforce characteristics	IV	H4	6.2429	5.3762	3.394**
Salesforce performance	DV	H5	5.5200	4.1280	5.182***
Sales organisation effectiveness	DV	H6	6.0095	3.7571	12.440***

* = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$. DV: Dependent Variable; IV: Independent Variable

Specifically, the results support Hypotheses: H1 and H2 indicating that the levels of market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation for the more effective SME's (leaders) are higher when compared to the less effective SMEs (laggards). These results suggest that managers could consider competitor orientation, interfunctional coordination, customer orientation, and latent need fulfilment as aspects of their organisation's market orientation. Similarly, managers need to consider aspects of autonomy, risk-taking, and proactiveness as parts of their entrepreneurial orientation. These results add to previous studies of market orientation and implications for business performance by demonstrating that organisations with higher levels of market orientation are more likely to be higher performers (Doyle and Wong 1998), and will obtain better economic and commercial results (Lado and Maydeu-Olivares 2001). Market orientation has a positive effect on esprit de corps, employee commitment and satisfaction (Jaworski and Kohli 1993, and Sigauw et al. 1994), and assists salesforce employees to understand their role (Farrell 2005), which in turn influences business performance. Market orientation positively influences the customer-oriented behaviours of salespersons (Langerak 2001, Sigauw et al. 1994, Menguc 1996).

Liu et al. (2003) suggest that a higher level of market orientation leads to more emphasis on entrepreneurship, which subsequently leads to higher levels of business performance. Similarly, Matsuno et al. (2002) posit that the greater the level of entrepreneurial proclivity, the greater is the level of market orientation. This can be explained in that entrepreneurial orientation facilitates organisation member's willingness and ability to commit to market learning activities, to recognise the need to reduce uncertainty, and to take a more calculated risk. This consequently promotes market orientation. Oliver and Anderson (1994) argue that supportive cultures in organisations were significantly related to behaviour control. Having a market-oriented and entrepreneurial oriented culture in organisations may facilitate salesforces to be more focused on customers' expressed and latent needs, and to be more proactive to the market changes. Today's customer can get information more readily than in the past; this tends to put more pressure on sales people to be relevant and timely in providing information that results in a sales outcome (Ingram 2004).

Hypotheses: H3 and H4 are also supported indicating significant differences in the degree of management control and salesforce characteristics between leaders and laggards. This means aspects of monitoring, evaluating, directing, and reward should be considered by managers seeking to develop more effective management control strategies. The salesforce characteristics could also be evaluated by managers. The importance to include salesforce characteristics has been supported by previous studies. Krafft (1999) suggests educational level of sales people is positively related to behaviour-based control. Competences and capabilities as dimensions of salesforce characteristics are expected to be higher under behaviour-based control (Baldauf et al. 2005). In this sense, behaviour-based controls are expected to lead to favourable psychological, behavioural, and performance consequences (Baldauf et al. 2005). Professional competence, team orientation, recognition motivation, sales support orientation, and planning orientation as dimensions of salesforce characteristics may enable salespeople to perform well. These characteristics have a significant direct impact on salesforce performance, which subsequently leads to sales organisation effectiveness.

Since market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, management control, and salesforce characteristics are positively related to salesforce performance and subsequently to sales organisation effectiveness (Grant et al. 2006a), it is expected that the results would show support for Hypotheses: H5 and H6. The results indicate that the levels of salesforce performance and sales organisation effectiveness are higher for leaders compared to laggards; therefore, Hypotheses: H5 and H6 are supported. Previous studies suggest that salesforce performance is strongly associated with sales organisation effectiveness (e.g. Babakus et al. 1994; Baldauf et al. 2001; Cravens et al. 1993; Piercy et al. 1999).

Conclusions

This study sought to investigate the differences in all dimensions of sales organisation effectiveness, specifically market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation between leaders and laggards in Australian SME's. The results suggest that the level of all variables in the model (i.e. market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, management control, salesforce

characteristics, salesforce performance, and sales organisation effectiveness) are superior for SME's classified as leaders compared to those classified as laggards.

The results provide a contribution to sales management knowledge by the inclusion of market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation in the model of sales organisation effectiveness. These two dimensions have not been included in previous known research. Previous study suggests that market orientation has been identified as an important driver of sales organisation effectiveness (Grant et al. 2006a, 2006b). In addition, previous studies on sales organisation effectiveness have been focused on samples of large corporations, whereas this research study has been focused on SME's. The study provides a classification of the sales organisation effectiveness: leaders and laggards.

Managerial Implications

Based on the significantly different level of market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation between leaders and laggards found in this research, managers should be encouraged to develop and implement a market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation climate in their organisation to enhance their salesforce performance. A market-oriented and entrepreneurial culture should be widely articulated and shared throughout the organisation and driven by management. Specifically in SME's, salespeople and managers of SME's need to be aware of both the customers' expressed and customers' latent needs for organisations (e.g. by frequently measuring customer satisfaction, and developing strategies driven by the need to create customer value). Since sales people play an important role in dealing directly with customers, managers also need to encourage their salespeople to be more proactive in responding to the market, such as responding to competitors action and analysing competitor marketing programs. They should build good customer relations, and be flexible and responsive to customer needs.

In addition, aspects of management control (e.g. monitor the day-to-day activities of salespeople), and salesforce characteristics (e.g. possess expert selling skills, also detailed product knowledge) need to be investigated for those organisations wanting to improve their salesforce performance and subsequent sales organisation effectiveness. These findings make a contribution in helping managers improve the performance of the sales unit in SME's by developing market orientation and entrepreneurial orientation in organisations as well as reviewing management control and salesforce characteristics.

Limitations and Further Research

Several specific limitations are acknowledged in this study. These limitations suggest that caution is needed in interpreting the findings but they also indicate a number of potential avenues for future research. As the sample was 77 SME managers across Australia it is recognised that using such a number of respondents is a limitation. For example, the sample for leaders and laggards was only 15 for each classification.

Future research should be conducted to resolve the limitations of the present study. First, it would be beneficial to duplicate this study with a larger number of respondents and in a different context. Using a larger number of respondents and a different context, (e.g.: internationally or larger organisation) may possibly enrich the insights gained in this study. Second, using the concept of leaders and laggards developed in this study, it would be advantageous to replicate the study in order to develop specific and more comprehensive measures for leaders and laggards.

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