



Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship

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Article information:

To cite this document:

Mostaque Zebal, Ahmed Ferdous, Colin Chambers, (2019) "An integrated model of marketing knowledge – a tacit knowledge perspective", Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship,

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JRME-03-2018-0018>

Permanent link to this document:

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An integrated model of marketing knowledge – a tacit knowledge perspective

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Received 7 March 2018
Revised 20 May 2018
8 September 2018
2 December 2018
Accepted 2 December 2018

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to develop and propose an integrated model of marketing knowledge from a tacit knowledge management perspective. This paper further aims at developing a linkage between explicit knowledge perspective (internal and external marketing) and tacit knowledge orientation of an organization, leading to improved business success.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper develops a conceptual model showing the integration of the internal, tacit and explicit knowledge perspectives that results in improved business success. The proposed model and associated propositions are drawn from the synthesis of relevant knowledge and marketing literature.

Findings – Five major associated propositions are offered in the paper, which inform both scholars and practitioners about what constitutes a holistic market orientation and how organizations can achieve business success by adopting both an internal and external orientation to tacit and explicit knowledge management.

Originality/value – The model makes an original contribution to theoretical and organizational marketing management knowledge. It does this by extending the conceptual and operational boundaries of existing models of internal and external marketing, aimed at helping organizations achieve competitive advantage and business success.

Keywords Internal market orientation, Tacit knowledge, Integrated model, External market orientation, Internal and external marketing knowledge, Intrapreneurial and entrepreneurship activities

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Organizations develop customer-oriented strategies to achieve strategic and sustainable business success. To execute an effective customer-focused strategy, organizations need to integrate their internal and external marketing activities (Ferdous *et al.*, 2013; Lings, 1999). An internal market orientation perspective contributes to a better understanding of an organization, promotes its services to employees and helps employees adapt to the

The authors would like to thank Dr Fara Azmat (Deakin University) for her helpful feedback and input in the drafting and revisions of this manuscript.



organizational procedural requirements and changes (Gummesson, 2000). In doing so, employees of any organization are more likely to be better equipped to deal with the requirements of the external market-oriented activities (Ferdous and Polonsky, 2014; Rodrigues and Pinho, 2010). According to Kohli and Jaworski (1990), market orientation entails three key elements – intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination and intelligence responsiveness. According to them, to be market oriented, a company must generate information of the customers' needs and wants and the factors affecting customers, disseminate or share collected information among the various departments of the company and respond to the information by designing and implementing products and services. For this purpose, Lings and Greenley (2005) provided an interchangeable view of internal marketing and suggested that this could be considered as internal market orientation, which could be parallel to external market orientation suggested by Kohli and Jaworski (1990). Thus, they suggested internal market orientation as the collection of information for the employees of the company, disseminating the collected information among the respective departments and responding to the disseminated information. Kaur *et al.* (2009), however, recommended that the three refined market orientation components (intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination and intelligence responsiveness), developed by Kohli *et al.* (1993), can be viewed as the core of the internal market orientation construct. As both internal and external market orientations involve the generation, dissemination and responsiveness of market information (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Slater and Narver, 1995; Lings, 2004; Greenley, 2009), the systematic processing of information about customers and competitors, including internal customers (i.e. employees), fosters a firm's knowledge about the market (Zebal, 2018; Luca and Atuahene-Gima, 2007; Nonaka, 1994). Past studies have deemed organizational knowledge as "market information" that proceeds through a series of activities, namely, knowledge acquisition, knowledge distribution, knowledge interpretation and organizational memory (Huber, 1991; Morman and Miner, 1997). While organizations strive to be knowledgeable about their respective markets, issues arise when organizations fail to implement internal and external knowledge management processes. This paper argues that to be successful in business, organizations need to have a sound understanding of the processes involved in generating and creating accurate and actionable market knowledge drawn from both tacit and explicit knowledge perspectives.

Tacit knowledge has to do with individuals' cognitive abilities, such as beliefs, insights, intuition, ideas and mental models, as well as know-how and skills that are rooted in personal experience (Salvatore, 2009). Tacit knowledge can also be regarded as being intangible, "created" by the individual, through experience and from "doing." Unlike explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is embedded within individuals rather than organizations (Nonaka, 1994). According to the literature, "tacit" knowledge can play a significant role in an organization's success by providing it with a source of competitive advantage (Tschetter and Tschetter, 2012). For example, Boisot (1998) argues that because tacit knowledge is difficult to duplicate and therefore less easily diffused, it is favored by Japanese manufacturers as a form of competitive advantage over American firms. The comparatively low turnover of staff in Japanese firms, as compared to American firms, results in the retention of tacit knowledge within the firm. While this knowledge forms a kind of quasi-organizational knowledge, it remains unencoded, "rooted in concrete applications" and absent from organizational and system documents such as training manuals. Therefore, it is largely unobserved and unknown by competitors.

Once knowledge has been encoded, that is capable of being conveyed throughout an organization by words, signs, symbols and numbers, and hence easy to share (Nonaka, 1991; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), it becomes "explicit" and capable of forming part of the wider

organizational systemic knowledge. It also becomes easier to diffuse, which has both positive and negative effects for the firm. Such knowledge is also sometimes referred to as “generated” knowledge. The difficulty organizations face in achieving competitive advantage through effective “tacit” knowledge management is how to capture tacit knowledge, which is essentially highly personal and subjective. Knowledge that is “mechanized” can be subsequently drawn upon, even when the original source of that knowledge has left the organization (Nonaka, 1991; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

Surprisingly, the examination of existing marketing literature reveals that both external (customers) and internal (employees) market orientation theories have largely been built on an explicit knowledge management perspective. Moreover, marketing literature viewed internal market orientation as internal explicit marketing and external market orientation as external explicit marketing. Such a perspective relies on the generation, dissemination and responsiveness of systemic information (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Slater and Narver, 1995; Narver *et al.*, 2004; Greenley, 2009; Zebal and Goodwin, 2012; Zebal and Hussein, 2014; Zebal, 2018). Further, Matsumo *et al.* (2005) provided a conceptual and empirical comparison on three different scales of market orientation, built on Kohli and Jaworski (1990), Narver and Slater (1990) and a newly developed extended market orientation scale. Although the paper took a more nuanced view and was an intermediary step between Jaworski and Kohli (1993), it was mainly built on Kohli and Jaworski’s (1990) conceptualization considering explicit marketing activities, which was no different than previous studies.

This suggests that tacit knowledge is generally either excluded or given less attention. However, as 90 per cent of organizational knowledge is argued to be “tacit” (Cader, 2007), it has been identified as a key element that drives an organization toward success. Given that tacit knowledge contributes to an organization’s overall success, through such activities as developing innovative products, ideas and programs, it is imperative to understand how this form of knowledge is linked to both internal explicit and external explicit marketing, what actual benefits an organization may get from such linking and how critical these benefits are for the success of an organization. In other words, there is a need to develop a theoretical framework that describes this organizational imperative to not only capture and codify tacit knowledge and turn it into explicit organizational knowledge but also to integrate tacit and explicit knowledge management into a holistic marketing program. In other words, there is a need to understand how such a theoretical framework can be operationalized and implemented with existing explicit marketing programs, which ultimately contribute to organizational success. This paper addresses the above questions by proposing an integrated model of internal and external marketing activities from the perspective of linking tacit and explicit knowledge, drawing on the existing literature on knowledge management and market orientation. By doing so, this paper further directs academics and strategic marketers to rethink what actually constitutes a holistic market orientation from a knowledge management perspective.

The sections that follow provide an overview of tacit knowledge orientation and internal and external marketing. This paper then proposes and discusses a holistic model along with five research propositions based on literature review. It also provides future research directions.

Knowledge management orientation and marketing

Davenport and Prusak (2000) defined knowledge as a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experience and information resulting from a combination of experiences, values, contextual information and expert insight. Knowledge contains information, but all information may not necessarily be considered as knowledge unless the information is

processed and gives meaning to the person/actor. For this purpose, [Ajmal and Koskinen \(2008\)](#) suggested that to convert information into knowledge, a person/actor must use his or her perception, skills and experiences to process this information. This means that the raw data or information collected from the field may not be immediately meaningful until the data is processed further ([Zack, 1999](#)). Considering the importance of knowledge in an organization in developing plans and programs today, there has been a growing interest among researchers about how an organization collects, processes, creates, interprets and uses knowledge ([Lahti and Beyerlein, 2000](#); [Ndlela and Du Toit, 2001](#); [Ajmal and Koskinen, 2008](#)). [Nonaka and Takeuchi \(1995\)](#) categorized knowledge as explicit and tacit.

According to [Ajmal and Koskinen \(2008\)](#), explicit knowledge has a fixed content, which is documented, structured, externalized and conscious and can be captured and shared through symbols, words, storytelling and information technology. On the other hand, tacit knowledge remains within the realm of personal human perception and behavior ([Duffy, 2000](#)), which refers to human feelings, intuitions and insights ([Guth, 1996](#)). This means that it is an individual's perception, skills and experiences that wholly depend on what experiences the individual's worldview contains ([Koskinen and Pihlanto, 2008](#)) and are used as an aid in innovation and decision-making ([Sarmiento, 2005](#)). Unlike explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is personal, undocumented, context-sensitive and internalized ([Duffy, 2000](#)). For a company to be more effective and productive, both explicit and tacit knowledge require systemic attention so that this knowledge can be acquired, processed, encoded, (codified) organized and communicated efficiently throughout the organization. This process is often referred to as knowledge management (KM) ([Alavi and Leidner, 1999](#); [Smith, 2001](#)). KM entails four components, namely, knowledge creation, knowledge capture, knowledge sharing and knowledge application ([Liebowitz, 2005](#)). [Hackley \(1999\)](#) conceptualized tacit knowledge/knowledge creation as "employees' problem-solving ability, political skills in selling findings within the organization, intuitive ability and sensitivity, augmentative, verbal alluring analytical skills, ability to develop ideas and design innovative products or services, and sensitivity to the company's strategic issues." This conceptualization is also reflected in [Guth \(1996\)](#) and [Duffy \(2000\)](#).

To be market oriented, a company must generate information about customers' needs and wants and the factors affecting customers, disseminate or share the collected information among the various departments of the company and respond to the information by designing and implementing products and services that satisfy customers' needs and wants ([Kohli and Jaworski, 1990](#)). [Narver and Slater \(1990\)](#), on the other hand, viewed market orientation as three behavioral components (customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination). [Zebal and Goodwin \(2012\)](#), however, saw no difference between these two, as competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination components of [Narver and Slater \(1990\)](#) were reflected in the intelligence/information generation and dissemination components of [Kohli and Jaworski \(1990\)](#) and [Kohli *et al.* \(1993\)](#). [Kaur *et al.* \(2009\)](#) recommended that the three refined market orientation components (intelligence generation, intelligence dissemination and intelligence responsiveness) developed by [Kohli *et al.* \(1993\)](#) can be viewed as the core of the internal market orientation construct. [Lings and Greenley \(2005\)](#) provided an interchangeable view of internal marketing and suggested that this could be considered as internal market orientation, which is parallel to external market orientation as suggested by [Kohli and Jaworski \(1990\)](#) and [Kohli *et al.* \(1993\)](#). Thus, internal market orientation was deemed to be the collection of information regarding the employees of the company, disseminating the collected information among the respective departments and responding to the outcomes of the disseminated information.

Interestingly, the three dimensions of both external and internal market orientation (information generation, information dissemination and information responsiveness) suggested by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Lings and Greenley (2005) are similar to the last three of the four components of knowledge management – knowledge capture, knowledge sharing and knowledge application (Liebowitz, 2005). This suggests that the first component – knowledge creation, suggested by Liebowitz (2005), has not been given much attention in both internal and external market orientation literature. Yet, knowledge creation is a vital issue for all organizations because process or product innovation, including new idea generation, depends, in part, on knowledge created by employees based on generated information.

Despite this, in most cases, organizations tend to focus on building explicit knowledge management capacity (Almeida and Kogut, 1999), even though tacit knowledge is critical in the process of undertaking internal and external market-oriented activities. Surprisingly, marketing literature to date lacks studies on how the integration of the two knowledge perspectives involving tacit and explicit knowledge (integrated with internal and external market activities) can contribute to organizational success. This paper attempts to fill that void and proposes an integrated model with five major research propositions based on existing theoretical and empirical literature. In doing so, the paper breaks new ground, providing an imperative to look at the possibility of exploring such integration and proposing an additional, more robust route to business success. The linkage between market-oriented activities and tacit or created knowledge activities are displayed in Table I. The information provided in the table echo Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Jaworski and Kohli (1993) who suggested market-oriented activities as not only sole responsibilities of the marketing department of a company but also a coordinated effort of all the departments (production and engineering, research and development, finance, human resources, purchase, etc.).

An integrated model of marketing knowledge

We propose a closed-looped integrated model of marketing knowledge from a tacit knowledge management perspective in Figure 1. The model focuses on the role of tacit knowledge management orientation and proposes a systematic attention to both explicit and tacit knowledge capture, codification, integration and dissemination because every organization requires gained (explicit) and created (tacit) knowledge. The model proposes that an organization should adopt two kinds of knowledge perspectives – tacit and explicit – and two types of marketing perspectives – internal and external. Within the model, internal market orientation is viewed as internal explicit marketing and external market orientation as external explicit marketing. While internal market-oriented activities are designed toward the internal customers (employees) of the organization, external market orientation activities are focused on its external customers. As can be seen in Figure 1, internal tacit knowledge management orientation has three elements – employee-contributed knowledge, tacit knowledge management program design and implementation and tacit knowledge management outcomes. Internal explicit marketing has three major elements – employee-oriented knowledge, designing and implementing employee-oriented internal explicit marketing programs and employee-oriented internal marketing outcomes. Similarly, external explicit marketing is seen as embodying three elements – external market-oriented knowledge, external explicit marketing programs and external explicit marketing outcomes. The model demonstrates that tacit knowledge management orientation impacts both internal and external explicit marketing and subsequently links to the overall success of an

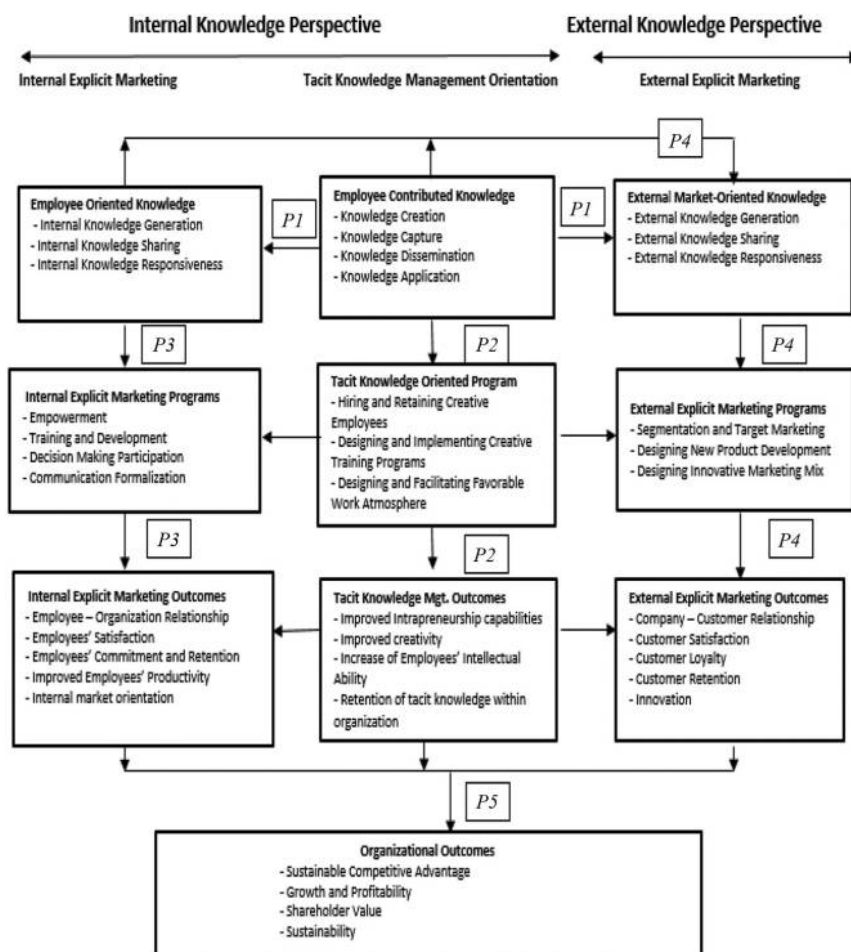
Explicit marketing activities	Propositional/declarative explicit knowledge (practical know required for implementing explicit marketing activities)	Tacit knowledge (created knowledge)
Intelligence generation regarding internal and external customers through formal and informal research	Research methodology Statistical techniques Statistical software	Problem-solving sensitive knowledge of when to use which research method Ability to negotiate on the internal budget and external cost The political skills to sell research results to the organization to justify and adopt the desired marketing strategy
Intelligence dissemination to the different departments of the company	Communicate the research results on market needs and wants with the use of knowledge learned through formal education Explain the benefits of the disseminated information using textbook knowledge	skills of being augmentative, persuasive, charming and humorous verbal alluring analytical skills that go beyond textbook and formal education knowledge to explain the benefits
Intelligence responsiveness Response design Response implementation	Production techniques Quantitative, accounting and finance techniques knowledge of legal and ethical constraints whether to respond and implement to the disseminated intelligence	Intuitive sensitivity to the market changes Creative ability to develop new ideas and marketing programs Ability to design innovative products or services Ability to modify existing products or services Sensitivity to the company's strategic issues

Table I.
Nature of explicit marketing and tacit knowledge activities

organization. An integrated model of internal and external marketing knowledge is provided in [Figure 1](#).

The model suggests that a particular company should adopt and set up programs for implementing all three types of knowledge activities (employee-oriented knowledge, employee contributed knowledge or tacit knowledge and external market-oriented knowledge). It is displayed in the model that a company must generate knowledge regarding the needs and wants of their employees, disseminate the generated knowledge to the appropriate authorities across the company and respond to the employees' needs and wants. The model further stresses on the importance of employee-contributed knowledge, e.g. tacit knowledge. The model suggests that to seek success, a company must create, capture, disseminate and apply knowledge. The model also stresses on the importance of generating knowledge regarding external customers' needs and wants, disseminating the generated knowledge across various departments of the company and responding to the knowledge by designing products and implementing action.

According to the model, if a company establishes internal explicit marketing programs and empowers its employees, trains them with appropriate knowledge, makes them a part of the company's decision-making and develops an appropriate communication system, they will be happy, committed and feel important to the company. This will ultimately improve the employees' productivity and improve the



Note: P = key propositions

Figure 1. An integrated model of internal and external marketing knowledge – a tacit knowledge perspective

overall success of the company. Further, hiring, training and retaining creative people by designing and facilitating an appropriate working atmosphere under tacit knowledge-oriented program will enrich the employees' capabilities. This in turn will contribute to improved intrapreneurship capabilities, creativity and intellectual abilities. Similarly, developing and selecting appropriate market segmentation, designing appropriate new products and innovating customer-oriented marketing activities under the external explicit marketing program will help in building company–customer relationship and increasing customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention. These in turn will bring overall success to the company. *The discussions that follow provide details about various components of the model, along with five major associated propositions.*

Internal knowledge perspective

Internal tacit knowledge management orientation

Tacit knowledge is created and held by the employees of an organization. Thus, it is considered to be employee-contributed knowledge. It is important that companies nurture innovative processes to generate and/or capture tacit knowledge from the experience and skills of their employees (Ajmal, 2009). This innovative process relates to both intrapreneurship and entrepreneurship activities as it covers a broad range of actions and processes, including innovation and creation of an organization (Nasution *et al.*, 2011). Firms with an intrapreneurial or entrepreneurial mindset display commitment to innovation, creativity, intellectual ability and pro-activity (Matsuno *et al.*, 2002; Morrish, 2011; Mirvahedi and Morrish, 2017). Parker (2011), however, argued intrapreneurship to be corporate entrepreneurship and venturing, which involve developing new ventures within the existing company that create new opportunities and economic values. On the contrary, entrepreneurship involves developing new ventures outside the existing company. Moreover, entrepreneurial companies are those where top managers adopt an entrepreneurial style that includes risk-taking, innovativeness and proactive activities (Covin and Slevin, 1989). Notwithstanding the difference between the two, tacit knowledge contributes to both entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial activities. Capel (2014) argued that mindfulness encourages the use of tacit knowledge, which ultimately promotes innovation and entrepreneurship. Companies such as Apple provide appropriate examples of an organization using tacit knowledge that involves both entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial activities in developing new business ventures, innovative ideas, products and services. Moreover, companies that adopt tacit knowledge truly and deeply value customer understanding in designing their offerings (Ojasalo and Ojasalo, 2018). However, tacit knowledge should not be limited to product innovation but also be related to developing innovative marketing programs and strategies.

Once the knowledge is created, it requires encoding through an appropriate process. When knowledge is captured and given a usable format, it becomes ready to be disseminated to the respective departments of the company for designing and implementing action. Although this is considered an internal tacit knowledge management process, the process parallels both internal and external market orientations, with the exception of “knowledge creation.” Knowledge creation, which generally refers to explicit or generated knowledge, is missing in the current market orientation literature (Ferdous *et al.*, 2013; Lings and Greenley, 2009; Lings, 2004; Voss and Voss, 2000; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Kohli *et al.*, 1993). Not all companies necessarily place emphasis on tacit or employee-contributed knowledge; rather, this kind of knowledge may vary depending on the higher or lower level of tacit orientation leading to hiring, training and retaining employees who are creative. For example, high-tech companies that have access to more creative employees may experience higher levels of tacit knowledge orientation (Cader, 2007). Companies such as Apple and Samsung are typical examples of innovative organizations that not only hire and retain creative people for their companies, but also implement tacit knowledge “capture” processes to ensure tacit knowledge can be transformed into explicit organizational knowledge (Alwis and Hartmann, 2008). This process assists the organizations to offer innovative products and services on a sustained and regular basis. Similarly, the motor vehicle industry typically demonstrates this type of knowledge management orientation.

The model further argues that companies that have higher levels of tacit or employee-contributed knowledge are likely to design and implement more effective tacit knowledge-oriented programs, such as hiring and retaining creative employees, designing and implementing creative training programs and designing and facilitating a favorable work

atmosphere, so that knowledge creation becomes a continuous process. It is imperative that a company captures the knowledge created by employees as they may not remain with the organization. Such a departure might result in the loss of existing organizational knowledge capital and future knowledge creation opportunities (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). As was stated earlier, 90 per cent of an organization's knowledge is claimed to be in the form of tacit knowledge (Cader, 2007), and this kind of knowledge lies within the intangible resources of individuals. Thus, it is important that companies design and implement tacit knowledge management programs. Without such programs it is difficult for companies to capture and convert this kind of knowledge into explicit knowledge (Nonaka *et al.*, 2000), and the loss of such knowledge could lead to the loss of competitive advantage. Within the tacit knowledge management orientation component, it is argued that if an effective tacit knowledge management program is designed and implemented, it results in internal tacit knowledge management outcomes in terms of product innovation and new product development, innovative internal and external marketing programs and increase of employees' intellectual abilities (Zong and Jin, 1986; Huang, 2001). All these stages within the tacit knowledge orientation impact the various parallel components of both internal and explicit marketing programs, as shown in Figure 1.

The business world has been experiencing rapid technological advancement, entrepreneurial capabilities, corporate expenditures and new market opportunities and challenges. Further, customers are turbulent in nature, in that, their preferences change fast and recklessly, making it necessary to introduce enormous changes in the marketing programs and strategies (Gupta *et al.*, 2017). As such, marketing strategies and tactics require further attention and marketing as a whole requires diversification into other types of innovative marketing methods (Lee *et al.*, 2010). Effective tacit knowledge management programs offer one such valuable contribution by helping to produce creative people and increasing the intellectual abilities of employees by ensuring an appropriate work atmosphere and creative training programs. As a result, tacit knowledge management programs will be able to benefit both internal and external marketing activities, contributing to overall business success. Therefore, based on the above discussions, we propose the following:

- P1. Organizations with higher levels of tacit knowledge management orientation will be more likely to design and implement better internal and external explicit marketing programs than those with lower levels of tacit knowledge orientation.
- P2. Organizations with higher levels of employee-contributed internal tacit knowledge will be more likely to design and implement effective tacit knowledge management-oriented programs, leading to improved tacit knowledge management outcomes than those with lower levels of employee-contributed internal tacit knowledge.

Internal explicit marketing

Within our proposed model, internal explicit marketing means applying marketing philosophy or employee-oriented knowledge to generate and process intelligence/information about the internal market (i.e. employees) and respond appropriately within the company so that employees can better serve external customers. This is also analogous to the concept of the internal marketing process where employees are viewed as internal customers and jobs as internal products, ensuring that organizations design appropriate responses that meet the needs and wants of employees (Greene *et al.*, 1994). Ferdous *et al.*

(2013) argue that effective generation, dissemination and responsiveness from internal marketing (i.e. higher levels of employee-oriented knowledge) stimulates the design and implementation of improved internal marketing programs. Further, Gounaris (2008) argued that if the internal marketing program of a company is implemented effectively, it ultimately impacts external marketing activities, leading to positive outcomes for both employees and organizations. However, it is not expected that all companies have high levels of employee-oriented knowledge, and this may vary across the industry, organization and departments, reflecting the nature and attitude of that particular organization and industry (Ferdous *et al.*, 2013; Ruekert, 1992). This means that some organizations may have higher levels of internal explicit marketing (employee-oriented knowledge) and others may experience lower levels of internal explicit marketing.

Within the proposed model presented in this study, it is argued that the variation (i.e. higher or lower levels) in the internal explicit marketing process is impacted by how a company manages the tacit knowledge orientation stages (shown in Figure 1). Tacit knowledge lies in the head of employees, and organizations lose this kind of knowledge immediately when its creative employees leave the organization (Cader, 2007). Thus, it is important that a company makes sure it retains and nurtures creative employees to facilitate the capture and retention of tacit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), which is ultimately responsible for internal marketing activities. Initiating and developing a tacit knowledge-oriented program may also provide additional organizational benefits. Re-conceptualizing “jobs” as “products” that are “sold” to employees may create an organizational culture that is conducive to reducing employee turnover and retaining creative and other critical employees within the organization. Retaining “creative” people who hold, generate and contribute intuitive knowledge provides organizations with the kind of corporate intelligence, market sensitivity and operational responsiveness that allows them to quickly develop new ideas in response to changing market conditions and, thereby, maintain competitive advantage. As a result, management is better equipped to negotiate the budgets required to accomplish these important tasks and to further develop organizational strategies designed to implement internal market-oriented responses for employees (Anderson, 1980; Hackley, 1999). In other words, organizations that are tacit knowledge oriented and place more importance on internal marketing activities are more likely to enjoy the benefit of retaining creative people who possess intuitive sensitivity and problem-solving abilities, which can lead to business success. On the other hand, an organization that is less tacit knowledge oriented may not be able to attract and retain creative employees possessing intuitive sensitivity and, thus, discourage employee-oriented knowledge and internal explicit marketing activities. Against this backdrop, the following proposition is offered:

- P3. Organizations with higher levels of internal tacit knowledge management orientation will better influence employee-oriented knowledge – which in turn will result in better design and implementation of internal explicit marketing activities – than those with lower levels of tacit knowledge management orientation.

External knowledge perspective

External explicit marketing

The external explicit marketing component within the proposed model highlights that an organization requires an efficient external explicit marketing program along with an orientation toward external market-oriented knowledge. Studies have suggested that external explicit marketing programs include marketing actions such as market

segmentation, target marketing, new product development and the appropriate marketing mix response (Gounaris, 2008; McGee and Spiro, 1988; Piercy and Morgan, 1991). Studies have argued that external market orientation is the driving force for an organization to design and implement external marketing programs (Ferdous *et al.*, 2013; Gounaris, 2008). Parallel to the effect of employee-oriented knowledge on internal explicit marketing programs, the proposed model highlights the influence of external market-oriented knowledge on the design and implementation of external explicit marketing programs.

Commensurate with stages of the external explicit marketing process (Figure 1), the proposed model also highlights that both internal explicit marketing programs and internal tacit knowledge management programs together act as the antecedents of external explicit marketing. This is because an organization requires both types of knowledge to achieve sustainability on the one hand, by looking after the employees through internal explicit marketing programs, and to capture employees' contributions through internal tacit knowledge management programs on the other hand. Once an organization is successful in retaining and motivating its employees through internal explicit marketing programs, the employees tend to become successful in creating knowledge, which results in product innovation and development, innovative marketing programs and an increase in intellectual abilities. These help trigger organizations to initiate external explicit marketing activities more efficiently because employees are now more empowered, motivated and trained to contribute to organizational success. Employees who enjoy a favorable atmosphere within an organization are more likely to develop more effective external explicit market-oriented programs. Therefore, the following proposition is offered:

- P4. The three stages within the external explicit marketing (market-oriented knowledge, explicit marketing programs and outcomes) of an organization are likely to be influenced by its internal explicit internal marketing and tacit knowledge management program.

Organizational outcomes from knowledge perspective

The proposed model in Figure 1 indicates that a knowledge-oriented company is one that adopts all three orientations, internal explicit marketing, internal tacit knowledge management, and external explicit marketing under the internal and external knowledge perspectives. The model further links these orientations with the overall success of an organization. This means that the success of an organization depends on how successfully an organization adopts knowledge-oriented activities. Several studies in the literature to date have identified the relationship between internal marketing and organizational success in terms of both financial and non-financial performances (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003; Ferdous and Polonsky, 2014; Yoon *et al.*, 2007; Rodrigues and Pinho, 2012). Market orientation literature also found empirical connections between external market orientation and organizational performance (Cervera *et al.*, 2001; Rodrigues and Pinho, 2010; Zebal and Goodwin, 2012).

The model in this study proposes a broader unified approach in seeking organizational success from a holistic perspective. Both internal and external knowledge components are linked within the model and present a loop highlighting how organizations should be able to make continuous improvements and adjustments as required, considering the company, internal and external customers, competition and turbulent market situations. The model further argues that an organization can improve its knowledge management programs and orientation and align them with current market structures, which in turn may result in improved business success (e.g. profit, market share, growth and competitive advantage). Therefore, the following proposition is offered:

- P5. Knowledge-oriented organizations that align their internal explicit marketing, internal tacit knowledge management and external explicit marketing activities are more likely to be successful in attaining improved business outcomes compared to organizations that are less knowledge oriented.

Discussion and implications

An important goal/outcome of any business is to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) (Shams, 2016). The literature has covered knowledge management, explicit knowledge, resource-based approaches and tacit knowledge as individual constructs contributing to SCA. Similarly, internal marketing (IM) has been covered as a construct leading to SCA (Ferdous *et al.*, 2013). This paper attempts to develop a model (Figure 1) that integrates these constructs into a holistic approach to achieving SCA, rather than treating one of these constructs as being pre-eminent in the search for SCA. This paper recognizes that the literature is problematic, in that there exist differences in the interpretation of the constructs, e.g. what constitutes “knowledge” in general and, by extension, what constitutes “explicit” and “implicit” knowledge specifically. Further, this study recognizes that there is a danger of drifting into the discipline of philosophy when attempting to clarify these constructs. It should also be pointed out that the paper does not attempt to reconcile the differences between the constructs at a theoretical or operational level. Rather, it takes a more pragmatic approach, accepting consensus views while still acknowledging potential flaws in such an approach, including the epistemological difficulties associated with understanding knowledge in general and the tacit/explicit knowledge dichotomy specifically.

This paper accepts that there are degrees of tacit knowledge and that, by some definitions, tacit knowledge is difficult, if not all but impossible, to capture, let alone codify and transfer. As such, this research recommends that this is an area that requires further study to clarify these constructs. This paper also acknowledges that it is equally difficult from an ontological perspective to determine the point at which “knowledge” is said to have been successfully transferred and understood in an objective manner, as all knowledge transfer is affected by context and interpretation. It follows that the “capture,” codification and transfer of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge is similarly problematic. However, our understanding is that there is sufficient literature to suggest that the pursuit of the holistic approach suggested by this paper is not only warranted but also long overdue from marketing, management (operational) and theoretical perspectives. In fact, it is likely that it is the very difficulties of identifying, capturing, codifying, transferring and interpreting tacit knowledge – such that it can become part of the firm’s explicit (systemic) knowledge resource base without it becoming easily translated and copied by competitors – that give a firm its best chance of finding SCA as its desired outcome.

Without these difficulties, the capture and codification of tacit knowledge is in danger of becoming victims of the process, stripping the tacit knowledge of its idiosyncratic form to the point that its capture, codification and subsequent storage within organization memory as systemic explicit knowledge is undesirable. Ultimately, this would suggest that rather than simply focusing on developing ways of capturing and codifying tacit knowledge, a firm should adopt a holistic approach as suggested by this paper, and focus on developing and implementing integrated internal marketing programs that promote employee retention and longevity, along with programs, to capture tacit knowledge. Such an approach goes part way to ensuring that the idiosyncratic, creative and intuitive aspects of tacit knowledge

remain embedded within individuals rather than organizations, where it is ultimately subject to exposure and copying by competitors.

Against the above backdrop, this paper is an attempt in proposing an integrated model for tacit knowledge management orientation and explicit marketing activities (i.e. internal explicit marketing, tacit knowledge management and external explicit marketing), leading to competitive advantage and business success. For this purpose, first, the paper provides a logical explanation on why all three knowledge perspectives (internal explicit marketing, external explicit marketing and tacit knowledge management) are necessary elements of an integrated process. Second, the three knowledge perspectives of the model and their components are discussed. Third, the implementation issues of each perspective, along with the suggestions about how an organization might design and implement its different programs, are discussed and examined. Finally, this paper identifies how each program should result in improved business success.

The model presented in the paper contributes to both theory and practice. As existing marketing literature provides less attention to tacit knowledge in terms of linking internal and external marketing perspectives, the proposed integrated model contributes to theory by including all three knowledge perspectives (tacit, internal and external explicit knowledge) as critical elements for achieving organizational success. By combining all three knowledge perspectives, the model provides not only a more nuanced view of the extant internal and external marketing literature but also a basis for future empirical testing with a view to ultimately operationalizing the model. Given that the components within the internal and external marketing perspectives, as highlighted in the proposed model, are interlinked, these links should help organizations to cope and adapt with the ever-changing turbulent market environments to enhance their competitiveness and consequently achieve business success ([Hardley and Mavondo, 2000](#)).

The model should also direct organizations to where and how to invest in programs that stimulate the creation and capture of tacit knowledge, impacting both internal and external marketing activities positively. Further, the model is designed to help organizations understand that through the introduction of integrated knowledge management programs, they will be better equipped to respond to changes in the market and be able to make better decisions about the allocation of scarce resources targeting the improvement of their internal and external marketing ([Gummesson, 2000](#)). Moreover, the systematic procedure outlined in the model helps an organization to design effective integrated knowledge management programs, together with strategies for implementation and monitoring of changes, leading to overall business success. For example, organizations that invest resources in tacit knowledge-oriented programs suggested by this model, allocating resources to hiring and retaining creative employees, designing and implementing creative training programs and designing and facilitating a favorable work atmosphere (P2), could expect to develop an organizational culture that encourages and values knowledge creation, capture, dissemination and application (P1). Such an organizational culture would be conducive to intrapreneurship, entrepreneurship, innovation and the retention of employees' tacit knowledge (P2) and lead organizations through developmental stages of "knowledge management maturity," developing ever-increasing awareness and application of the five propositions suggested in this model. Mature organizations may be expected to demonstrate higher levels of, and operate at different stages of, tacit knowledge orientation maturity, where at the simplest level, the organization understands the potential of a tacit knowledge orientation through to those that possess a total knowledge management orientation. This level of "maturity" would be reflected in their operational effectiveness, staff retention rates,

higher levels of sense of employees' sense of empowerment and satisfaction, innovation and an increasing level of competitive advantage, ultimately leading to business success.

Future research direction

The model proposed and presented in this paper was developed drawing on anecdotal literature support. Therefore, it is suggested that further empirical research be conducted to test the propositions in the study. For this purpose, a qualitative and action-based research may be conducted initially to provide more insight to check the appropriateness of the linkage of the three different knowledge perspectives used in the model. Future research may also develop measures to operationalize the variables in the proposed model and empirically test the associated propositions. Furthermore, research may be conducted to overlay this model with a complementary framework for recognizing and assessing the levels of an organization's knowledge management orientation maturity. Such a complementary framework would provide organizations with the potential to map their existing and desired levels of knowledge management orientation maturity while using this integrated model of explicit internal and external marketing from a tacit knowledge management perspective as the underlying point of reference. Finally, tacit knowledge can be said to develop with organizational longevity – another reason to foster employee retention. Therefore, any future studies that test the IM business model that seeks to gain SCA must integrate employee retention and the gathering of organizational knowledge from and by as many individual employees as possible within their research. The retention of key employees who hold tacit knowledge, irrespective of its origin, should form part of any integrated model testing of IM.

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