

An examination of artefacts in market oriented firms

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Cynthia O'Regan,
Institute of Technology Carlow,
cynthia.oregan@itcarlow.ie

Tomas Dwyer,
Institute of Technology Carlow,

Julie Mulligan,
Institute of Technology Carlow,

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ORGANISATIONAL ARTEFACTS IN MARKET ORIENTED FIRMS

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature and influence of artefacts in market oriented firms.

Design/methodology/approach: Document analysis, direct observation and fourteen key informant interviews were undertaken in six case study companies.

Findings: Artefacts are a core element in a market oriented culture. Artefacts embody a market oriented culture in a multisensory, complimentary, multidimensional, synergistic, coherent, consistent and unique manner. Artefacts perform similar functions across market oriented companies in reinforcing as well as creating values, norms and behaviours as part of a collective market oriented culture. Thus the findings develop a detailed understanding of the roles and functions of artefacts in a market oriented culture to aid its implementation and are argued as part of the inception process, an antecedent and core to a market oriented culture

Practical implications: Requires managers to assess the degree to which they have developed and utilised market oriented artefacts in the establishment and strengthening of a market oriented culture.

Originality/value: This paper addresses the limited understanding of market oriented artefacts.

Keywords: market oriented culture, market oriented artifacts, market oriented artefacts

Introduction

Being a market oriented firm makes sense; it enhances performance (Spillan et al., 2013). To be a market oriented firm means implementing a market oriented culture (Lee et al., 2006; van Raaij and Stoelhorst, 2008; Hogan and Coote, 2014).

Fortunately, we know quite a bit about what constitutes a market oriented culture. It comprises of four distinguishable but interrelated layers; values, norms, behaviours and artefacts (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000). Market oriented values have been found to positively influence market oriented norms. These norms have then been found to positively influence market oriented artefacts which, in turn, positively influence market oriented behaviours. In essence, the organisational culture (i.e. values, norms and artefacts) drives the market oriented behaviours in an organisation that enhance the performance (Sheppard, 2011). Less hierarchical or linear models of a market oriented culture have also been supported with values, norms and artefacts arranged in a more dynamic relationship enhancing the performance of the firm as a collective (Hatch, 1993; Lee et al., 2006).

It is clear is that artefacts are a key element or layer in a market oriented culture and thus in its implementation. Artefacts communicate the values that encourage market oriented practices (Griffiths and Grover, 1998). Artefacts also support the norms that produce market-oriented behaviours (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000). Furthermore, artefacts are argued as strengthening the degree of market oriented behaviours in the organisation (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000 p. 452). In short, artefacts are a core element in a market oriented culture and its implementation and thus need to be understood.

Background

A definition of artefacts from an organisational culture perspective has been the subject of much literature (Gagliardi, 2017) and providing a definitive version is beyond the scope of this paper. However, an understanding of the concept is necessary for the purposes of the present research. Schein (2006, p.25) explains that artefacts include all the "... phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels when one encounters a new group ...". Schein (2006, p.26) in his explanation includes: the visible products of the group such as architecture; the language; the technology and products; artistic creations; the style including clothing, manners of address, and emotional displays; myths and stories; its published values; and its rituals and ceremonies. Higgins and Mcallaster (2004) explain cultural artefacts are objects and behaviours that characterise one organisation as opposed to another. The authors building on the work of Shrivastava (1985) explain there are at least "five primary types of cultural artifacts — key values and norms; myths and sagas; language systems and metaphors; symbols, rituals and ceremonies; and the use of physical surroundings including interior design and equipment" (Higgins and Mcallaster, 2004, p. 64).

Four categories of market oriented artefacts have been proposed - stories, arrangements, rituals and language. These four categories of artefacts in a market oriented context reflect the organisational culture definitions provided although narrower in respect of the exclusion of values and norms; which are addressed elsewhere in the marketing literature (Homburg and

Pflesser, 2000; Gebhardt et al., 2006). A focus on these four categories of artefacts is justified in that they have an influence on the degree of market orientation as well as play a crucial role in determining market oriented behaviours within an organisation (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000, Byrne, 2014; Tiernan, 2015).

An outline of the four categories of market oriented artefacts (stories, arrangements, rituals and language) can add to our understanding (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000). First, stories are defined ‘as a narrative based on true events - often a combination of truth and fiction’ (Trice and Beyer 1984, p. 655). Stories provide a shared understanding among employees and a reminder of the shared values (Turner and Spencer, 1997). Many stories are about company heroes who serve as models or ideals for the norms and values. Thus stories may include employees going beyond the call of duty for customers (Farrell, 2002). Second, arrangements cover what Schein (1984, p. 9) described as “the architecture of its physical environment” thus the offices, meeting rooms and communal areas along with the buildings and exterior surroundings. Higgins and McAllister (2003) similarly explain arrangements refer to the physical evidence; the facilities, equipment, interior and exterior design and decoration. An example might be an open and friendly customer entrance and welcome area (Farrell, 2002). The physical layout is thus serving not only an instrumental but symbolic and aesthetic function; expressing its values and norms (Hogan and Coote, 2014). Third, rituals of market orientation could include events for customers such as meetings or regular awards for customer oriented employees (Farrell, 2002). Rituals such as award dinners and annual gatherings can convey the organisation’s values; indicate who management see as important to the organisation (Shrivastava, 1985) and create a bond among employees (Turner and Spencer, 1997). Finally, language within an organisation is a manifestation of the organisation culture; indicating the degree of market orientation. For example, openly discussing how to solve customers’ problems. The language and metaphors used inform employees about organisational expectations, roles, scope, objectives and organisational membership (Hogan and Coote, 2014). The organisation can be argued as created daily by the everyday communications – the language of its members (Turner and Spencer, 1997). Thus there are four categories of market oriented artefacts.

However, there are limitations to our knowledge. The process by which the different layers or dimensions of culture (values, norms and artefacts) drive market oriented behaviours is not sufficiently documented (Griffiths and Grover, 1998; Homburg and Pflesser, 2000; Hogan and Coote, 2014). Addressing this limitation in part means a deeper understanding of market oriented artefacts is required and thus has been called for (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000; Farrell, 2005; Byrne, 2014; Tiernan, 2015). Artefacts as a key element in a market oriented culture need to be better understood. For example, Harris (1998) explains that there is under-emphasis on verbal and behaviour artefacts and argues recommendations on the development of a market oriented culture are dependent in part on the ‘delineating’ of artefacts. Lee et al. (2006) argues for further empirical investigation of the components of a market oriented culture – values, norms and artefacts – for their disaggregate and interaction effects on firm performance. Moorman and Day (2016) in identifying future research priorities to achieve ‘marketing excellence’ urge scholars to further examine artefacts for novel insights including identifying the roles of artefacts in marketing strategies. There is also inconsistencies in the literature, Farrell (2005, p. 271) found that ‘market-oriented artefacts . . . do not have a significant impact

on behaviour'. Thus, contradicting Homburg and Pflesser's (2000) findings that market oriented artefacts can inspire market oriented behaviour. Farrell (2005) does however argue for better measures of market oriented artefacts surmising this might have produced a different result in his research. While, it is acknowledged artefacts are context dependent; thus it is impossible to create an exhaustive list (Harris, 1998) more detail can evidently be provided. Examining artefacts will lead to "a better understanding of the forces driving market orientated behaviour" (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000, p. 450). In essence, artefacts in market oriented firms need to be understood.

We do have some knowledge. There is significant organisational culture literature that includes a focus artefacts. However, in a market oriented context the emphasis on artefacts in the literature narrows (Bitner, 1992; Turner and Spencer, 1997; Farrell, 2002), The research focused on market oriented culture is significant but artefacts are often dealt with within this broader context and thus the focus and necessary detail is limited. For example, Homburg and Pflesser (2000) looking at the influence of a market oriented culture on organisational performance acknowledged their investigation of artefacts was 'exploratory'; explaining artefacts have not been considered in the literature. Similarly, Gebhardt et al. (2006) outlining how becoming market oriented is essentially a cultural transformation acknowledged the role of artefacts and symbols in this process but the detail was still limited in the what and how of artefacts. A clearer explanation of artefacts and their influence is still required.

A market oriented culture is central to being market oriented thus a detailed understanding of artefacts is required. Artefacts can be used as a tool to infuse a market oriented culture in an organisation (Turner and Spencer, 1997; May, 2001). However, additional knowledge and understanding is needed. Thus this research will focus on detailing the nature and influence of artefacts in a market oriented firm specifically four categories; stories, arrangements, rituals and language.

Research Approach

The purpose of the paper is to provide an examination of the nature and influence of artefacts in market oriented firms. The research involved a qualitative investigation of six case study companies.

A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate allowing for the collection of data such as stories, rituals and other artefacts (Brown, 1998, p. 60). A quantitative approach is dominant in the fields of market orientation and organisational culture, researchers have argued moving beyond a positivist methodology to reveal 'breadth and depth' (Harris and Ogbonna, 1999:185; Brown, 1998).

Furthermore, a qualitative approach utilising a case study design was deemed suitable. While artefacts are considered the most visible layer of organisational culture they can be hard to decipher and often ambiguous in nature with their meaning only becoming clear if one is inside the company (Schein, 2010) in the way a case study design can allow.

There are many research methods available to a qualitative researcher utilising a case study design; with multiple data sources enhancing the credibility of data (Yin, 2009). Thus data

was collected qualitatively using three research methods; document analysis, direct observation and interviews.

In selecting the case study companies the population of interest selected was organisations in Ireland who showed characteristics of market orientation. The sampling frame selected to represent the population of interest was organisations who were nominated or won the Carlow Chambers of Commerce Awards in 2017. These organisations were judged by their peers as successful and thus arguably market oriented.

The research sample consisted of a purposive sample of six companies from the Chambers of Commerce Awards who responded positively to an invitation to take part in the research. A multi case study design has been argued for when investigating market orientation (Harris, 2002a). The companies selected were judged likely to provide data on market oriented organisational culture based on the following process. From a full list of shortlisted and/or winners of the awards competition sole-traders and non-profit companies were excluded, as well as companies with less than 10 employees, as they were deemed to be possibly problematic in size to answer the research questions. The websites of this revised list of companies were then screened for evidence of market orientation.

A multi-informant approach was taken to the interviews where possible to allow a more complete 'gauge' in investigating market orientated artefacts (Harris, 2002b: 248). Interviews were arranged with employees from each case study company from functions such as marketing and customer relations (n=14) over a three-month period from December 2017 to February 2018. Previous studies have indicated the importance of selecting key participants with different functions in the organisation to establish a more informed view of market orientation (Kohli et al.,1993; Homburg and Pflesser, 2000; Harris, 2002b). The interviews were semi-structured using the research aim as the basis for the interview questions.

As part of the data collection process a tour of each company's headquarters took place with observations recorded (Harris and Ogbonna, 2000) and photographs taken. The tours covered canteens, common areas, meeting rooms, offices, reception areas and work areas for employees. In addition, photos were taking of artefacts in the participating organisations and documents were analysed such as organisations' mission statement and employee handbooks. Field notes detailing data gathered were written-up following each site visit. See Table 1 for details on the data collection.

Table 1: Research sample and data collection

Company	No. of Interviews	Interviewee roles
Autolaunch Ltd	4	Sales Manager Human Resource Manager Asst. Human Resource Manager Operations Manager
Netwatch	4	Sales Manager Marketing Manager Corporate Responsibility Manager Customer Relationship Manager
Carlow Dental Practice	1	Practice Manager
Wright Insurance Brokers	2	Sales Manager Human Resource Manager
Arboretum Garden Centre Ltd	1	Owner and Founder
Walsh Whiskey Distillery	2	Human Resource Manager Marketing Manager

There was a substantial amount of qualitative data gathered from the recorded interviews. Thematic analysis of the transcribed recordings allowed for the identification of patterns and themes within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A general synopsis was compiled of the recurring themes and findings for each interview and for each company followed by a synopsis of common themes across all interviews (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Data quality processes were adhered to in all aspects of the research process to enhance the quality of the analysis findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1986). The researchers' personal codes of ethical practice was brought to the research as well as receiving institutional approval.

Findings

This section will present the research findings preceded by a brief outline of the case study organisations. The market oriented artefacts of six case study organisations were investigated as part of the research; Autolaunch Ltd., Netwatch, Carlow Dental Practise, Wright Insurance Brokers, Arboretum Garden Centre Ltd. and Walsh Whiskey Distillery. Autolaunch Ltd. is part of the Magna Group, a leading automotive supplier with 317 manufacturing operations and 83 product development, engineering and sales centres in 29 countries with 168,000 employees. Autolaunch currently have a 14,000 sq.m plant in Co Carlow employing 295 employees. Netwatch was founded in 2003 by David Walsh and Niall Kelly. The company provides a remotely monitored closed circuit television (CCTV) service to homes and business across four continents. The company employs 220 staff across their three offices in Carlow, Newry and Boston and is set to double in size after merging with three companies in the US and the UK that will more than double its work force and generate revenues in excess of €60m. Carlow Dental Practice is a full service dental practise employing 50 people. The organisation founded in 2011 has won a significant number of industry awards. Wright Insurance Brokers founded

in 2012 by Tony and Breda Wright is a leading company in the Irish insurance sector employing over 120 people. Headquartered in Wexford the organisation's awards include the Carlow Chamber award of Best Place to Work. The Arboretum in Carlow was founded by Rachel Doyle in 1977. It is a garden centre based business currently employing 117 people. Based on a ten-acre site, Arboretum provides the complete lifestyle experience with a pets store, garden café, home and gift, furniture area and a qualified team of plant experts under one roof. The organisation has won several business awards such as the Retail Excellence Garden Centre of the Year 2017 and Company of the Year 2016. Walsh Whiskey Distillery is a producer of premium Irish whiskeys established in 1999 by Bernard and Rosemary Walsh. In 2014 the organisation built the first new whiskey distillery in the South-East of Ireland in 100 years. The €25m distillery at Royal Oak is located on an 18th century estate and has 40 acres of pastoral land. A new visitor centre is being developed and it is hoped that around 75,000 people will visit each year.

Arrangements

The research sought to identify the nature of arrangements in market oriented firms. Three themes were identified: arrangements encourage open communications; arrangements have a customer orientation; arrangements communicate the organisational values.

Arrangements encourage open communications

The first theme indicates the design and layout of the buildings were designed to allow for open communications between organisational members. Open-plan offices were prevalent throughout the market oriented organisations. A manager from Autolaunch explained that their open-plan office “breaks down barriers and everyone is kind of working together”. A manager from Wright Insurance explained that open-plan offices improve communications because you are more accessible to people:

... it improves communication through the teams when they can hear what's going on and across in different teams and that it just improves that relationships piece between different colleagues
...

An open-door as well as an open-plan policy was outlined by a manager in Netwatch. This open-door policy encouraged communications between organisational members;

... its an open-door policy and we are very big into open communication like if someone feels that there is something not right or you're not happy with the way things are going, like you don't feel it's working right for the customer, the company or the specialist. We would very much encourage the employee to come and talk to us and if they don't they are hiding as far as we are concerned. So that is important that we get feedback from employees and we encourage that a lot.

Additional arrangements that were evident in supporting open communications were communal areas such as canteens, staff rooms, gardens and smoking areas. A number of managers explained that these communal areas were provided to support communications between organisational members such as a manager from Walsh Whiskey who explained “... the canteen facility is an area where people can step out either to socialise or have a quick

meeting”. Similarly, a manager from Netwatch explained “... the canteen is the main meeting point for anyone to socialise in apart from the smoking area ... but we spend most of our time in the garden”.

Arrangements have a customer orientation

Arrangements are designed to meet the requirements of customers. For example, reception areas were physically welcoming with designated seating areas for customers. Similarly, meeting rooms in the firms were aimed at meeting customer requirements. A manager in Autolaunch explains how visiting customer requirements are met:

When a customer comes he may be here for a couple of days so we allocated him a room. We even have phone, internet access etc. which he will require. This would be his room to do his work separate from all us. So, visitors can have all their own individual rooms.

Arrangements communicate values

Arrangements in market oriented firms communicate an organisation’s values through an interior decorated with posters, mission statements and organisational awards. For example a poster display hanging on the wall in Netwatch includes a photograph of each employee, their role in the organisation, the employee’s awards and pictures of employees socialising at organisational events all indicates an appreciation of the employees.

Mission statements hanging on the walls in reception areas and throughout the organisations similarly communicated the values of each organisation. Organisational awards displayed similarly communicated the values of the organisations. These awards were displayed at reception areas and throughout the organisations. A manager from Carlow Dental explained that their customer service awards illustrate to customers that the organisation can be trusted: “... it shows the trust, so they [the customers] have trust in us, they say oh yes, they are being awarded here ...”. A manager in Walsh Whiskey explained that their awards communicate to customers that the product is of a high quality and standard and that is something valued by the organisation: “From a customer’s point of view, you know awards are always seen as recognition of quality and high standards”.

In summary, the findings indicate arrangements encourage open communications, have a customer aspect and communicate values.

Market oriented stories

The research sought to identify the nature of stories in market oriented firms. Three themes were identified in the stories in the case study organisations; the organisations’ had a culture of storytelling, the stories reveal a customer focus and stories are told about the origins of the organisations.

A culture of storytelling

There is a culture of storytelling in the firms. For example, a manager from Netwatch explained that she had a story about almost every employee in the organisation: "... I could tell ye a story about [that employee] and how [he] made [his] mark and pick any name and I could ...". Additionally, the same manager explained that as part of their reward system employees were invited to document stories about those colleagues they feel are worthy of recognition. The manager explained how this process began:

... we thought we will do something to recognise people and we will ask them to vote for someone and we will give them a plaque in the boardroom ye know that lovely kind of thing. But when we started getting the stories back from people about the things that people did for customers [and] for each other for... ye know the team work and the focus ... it really hit ... the owners so now they don't just put down a name they give a reason and a story [when nominating someone for an award].

The culture of storytelling was also in evidence in Wright Insurance when a manager explained that the story of how the organisation got started is told at induction. Similarly, in Netwatch "David [the owner] meets every single new employee first and he talks to them about [the company] about the story ...".

Customer focus

Stories shared in market oriented firms frequently have a customer focus. For instance, a manager shared a story about an exceptional employee;

... [an employee] drove up to Dublin with an [insurance disc] for a customer and it wasn't even her customer, it was someone else's customer in the transport team [in Wexford] and she was in commercial up in Carlow and she drove specifically up and she [went] out of her way to do that.

The following story shared by a manager in Netwatch similarly demonstrates this customer focus:

... we have had installers who have got up from their Sunday dinners because a customer had rung them directly and [then they] drove to a site in Donegal and fixed something for them, that is not their job and they don't have to do [it] and anyone else would say that [it] could wait till Monday but because they have a personal relationship with the customer and they were worried about that person's security they would do that.

These examples illustrate the customer focused nature of stories.

Origins of the organisations

Stories about the origins of the organisations and their founders were prevalent and appear to have had a cultural influence. A manager in Autolaunch shared a story revealing the characteristics of the owner:

...so, he [the founder] was a very hand[s] on type of individual and very innovative, so I think that spread throughout the company, the company is big now. I don't know how many employees it has ... I'm not so sure, so you [still] have that type of innovation hands on culture.

A manager in Walsh Whiskey similarly explained that the characteristics of their owners were influential in the company:

[the owners] stamp is on everything yea know, they started the company so ... their drive for quality and premium I think is instilled in all of us.

The stories of the origins of the organisations also demonstrate the aforementioned customer focus. A manager in Netwatch outlined the customer focused origins of the company:

I joined around 2004, 2005 early on we only had a very few sites at the time, but we were starting off, ... but the focus even then was, we were doing it because we were trying to get rid of the middle man and work directly for the customer.

The stories about the origins' of the case study organisations are outlined as having an impact on the culture.

In summary, the research sought to identify the nature of stories in market oriented firms. Three findings are identified; there was a culture of storytelling in the firms, stories emphasised the customer and stories about the organisations' origins inculcate the culture

Market oriented Rituals

The research sought to investigate the nature of rituals in market oriented firms. Five themes were identified: rituals are customer focused; rituals communicate an organisation's values; rituals celebrate success and say thanks, rituals incentivise employee behaviour; rituals encourage employee cohesiveness.

Rituals are customer focused

Rituals such as organisational events and meetings in market oriented firms have a customer focus. These are planned events that show an appreciation of customers or discuss customer related issues. For example, a manager from Netwatch stated that they have regular events such as, "bringing the customer out for the day ... like it could be to a concert ye know, a match or whatever". Equally, a manager from Wright Insurance stated that they plan a very big customer event every year: "... we do a transport event every year and we host the IRHA [Irish Road Haulage Association] conference ...". Similarly, organisational meetings in market oriented firms have a focus on customer related issues. For instance, a manager from Autolaunch explained what happens at monthly meetings:

... they would discuss customer complaints that had come in throughout the month and they would highlight them and spread them throughout the whole organisation so that their employees were aware of these issues.

Another manager in Wright Insurance explained that their quarterly meeting: "was based on [their] customer experience survey".

Rituals communicate values

Rituals in market oriented firms communicate the organisations values. For example, a manager from Netwatch explained that rituals such as employee of the year awards are very important in communicating the organisation's values:

[Employee awards] are a huge importance, a huge value. They have a real value. [They] reinforce to outside customers and potential customers what we are about. It also helps us with any partners that we would align with, they want to see our values, our cultures and to be able to say this is our culture and this is our night and here's a video. This is us, we're laying it out ... this is what we do.

Similarly, a manager from Wright insurance explained that employee awards are not only, "a celebration for something that has been achieved ... but also if you are trying to drive the values and embed them in the company culturally". Regular meetings also communicate the organisation values by alerting members to what managers see as important. A manager from the Arboretum, when explaining the agenda for their regular staff meetings explained it involves:

... looking at our core values and our standards. And we have a standards book and a core value book and it's just making sure that everyone is on the same hymn sheet.

Rituals celebrate success and say thanks

Social events take place regularly to celebrate organisational success and are designed as a form of thank you to employees. For instance, a manager in the Arboretum explained that they plan events throughout the year to say thank you to employees:

Yes, we do daft things we have gone to the races and had a barbecue upstairs at the race meeting, we have gone camping, we go canoeing down the barrow and they love that ... we have gone to the dogs in Newbridge ... we just do things to say thanks to the staff ...

Additionally, a manager in Netwatch explained that social events are a celebration and say thank you to employees:

[Celebrating] success would be based all around the social events and celebrating how Netwatch is doing well. Barbecue days, communication days, employee of the year, family trips to Tayto Park, we do all that thing. Clara Lara was the family trip this year and we do all of that kind of social events.

Rituals incentivise employee behaviour

Rituals reward specific employee behaviour that is deemed appropriate. For instance, a manager in Wright Insurance explained they distribute cinema vouchers to employees to say thank you to their colleagues for their assistance:

... there are also thank you initiatives where if you do something small for a colleague, like really help them out daily [then] they can say thank you and then we have vouchers for cinemas and stuff like that they can give them.

Additionally, a manager in Netwatch explained that they also have incentives for rewarding acceptable behaviour:

... during the year to allow the managers to recognise the work their teams are doing [the owner] has tickets like for matches, rugby matches coming up, tickets for concerts and things like that and he asks us to send him a mail when you've caught someone doing something good. So it could be like someone coming in and helping us out with overtime for the month or if someone came in and spotted something that wasn't quite right on the customer side and came back to us and gave us the feedback so we can fix it ...

The above quotes illustrate that incentives are given to employees to reward and reinforce what is considered acceptable behaviour.

Rituals encourage employee cohesiveness

Rituals are aimed at encouraging a cohesiveness among employees. For instance, a manager in Netwatch explained:

The other tradition that [the owner] feels strongly about is that induction is only held on the first Monday of every month because he feels that if people start together they will stay together and it's interesting because I started with another two ladies back in 2014 and we are good friends, we go to lunch together every Friday and we work for different departments.

Rituals such as scheduled weekly, monthly or quarterly team events also encourage employee cohesiveness in the firms. For instance, a manager in Walsh Whiskey explained that they would have planned nights out for employees:

... in the evenings where we would have typically maybe we would bring someone in to make cocktails in the distillery and you know and make sure all staff are off [work] and it is actually really important for [the owner] and the company that like everybody goes.

The above quote demonstrates that team events are important for bringing employees together. Rituals such as recognising employee personal milestones similarly can encourage employee cohesiveness. For instance, a manager from Walsh Whiskey explained:

... birthdays are always celebrated with a cake and a coffee with a break and any kind of a personal milestone as well. So, everything is about bringing the team together and not just for work but in a social setting.

Other rituals identified in market oriented firms that encourage employee cohesiveness were the organisations traditions such as starting the day at a certain time or in a certain way, for instance, a manager in Netwatch explained that one of their traditions is that every employee in the organisation starts work at eight o'clock:

... it sets a tone, a pace, an ownership and a productivity aspect to the culture. We are head of the game we are in before others, ye know we are all fired up ...

Similarly, a manager from Carlow dental practice explained that every employee in their organisation starts at 8.30. Additionally, a manager from the Arboretum explained that every morning, "employees would have what they call a huddle or a cuddle, a huddle means that all employees get together and go through what the plans are for the day". This manager further added "it's sort of a bonding [session] and I think it's even good for the staff to see we are a united".

In summary, rituals have a customer focus, communicate the values, celebrate success and act as a thank you, reward employee behaviour and create a cohesiveness among employees.

Market oriented Language

The research sought to identify the nature of language in market oriented firms. Five themes were identified in the language of the case study organisations; each organisation has a uniqueness to its language, language is customer focused, language is friendly, language communicates the organisation's values, language encourages employee cohesiveness.

Unique language

Market oriented firms had a uniqueness to the language they used linked to the context of the organisation. For instance, the language used by employees in Autolaunch was very technical a manager explaining: "you've got to be able to understand the technical requirements of the customer" further explaining:

We do production for all the high spec automobiles like Bentley, Porsche, Rolls Royce, BMW and that's who our customer base is ... you can appreciate everything has to be spot on.

In contrast, Netwatch employees explained that it wasn't about the product they sold, it was about the customers' peace of mind – there was someone looking after them:

... we are a security company but what we sell is not actually cameras it's peace of mind. Because at 3 o'clock in the morning if there is someone breaking into your home or whatever, you don't care if the camera is stuck up with duct tape you just want the peace of mind that someone on the end of the phone is looking after you ...

Language has a customer focus

Employees in market oriented firms speak about what they can do for customers. Employees regularly spoke about satisfying the customer needs and wants. For instance, a manager in Wright Insurance stated, "it's always about the customer and what we can do to make the customer's life easier". A manager in Autolaunch explained that, "sometimes the customer doesn't know what they want, and it is our job to figure that out". A manager in Netwatch explained that nothing ever gets discussed without taking the customers into account:

Nothing ever gets discussed without thinking well were does the customer fit in here? how will the customer feel about that? what difference will it make for the customer? ... it's just the ethos of the company.

Employees in the firms spoke about building and maintaining relationships with their customers to help in understanding their needs:

... our CRO [customer relationship officers] are very interactive ... with the customers. [They are] constantly contacting them like, how you are getting on? is everything ok for you? do you need anything from us? you still happy? We have lots of touch points with our customers always trying to keep in contact and keeping that line of communication open so they always feel very

comfortable coming back and talking to us ... That is why we do so well it's the relationships that we build.

Language is friendly

When employees in the firms communicated with each other the language used was typically informal friendly. For instance, a manager in Carlow Dental explained that when employees are refereeing to the clinicians they always give them their title first followed by their first name : “ ... when we talk about clinicians ... so its Doctor Christian or Doctor Williams”. When a manager in Autolaunch spoke about the owner he explained: “that everyone knows him by his first name there is no titles used in any of the communication with him”. A manager from Netwatch explained that their communications has an informal tone:

... we would communicate stuff formally, but we have a very informal tone to the communications ... Netwatch is like a family ... we do a lot to build that culture of open door policy ...

In Wright Insurance a manager explained that the friendly nature of internal communications impacts on the resulting the communications with customers:

... it is down to our friendly staff they naturally have that type of attitude when they are dealing with people and that is reflected in the relationships they have here internally as well and that internal [friendliness] reflects out with the customer as well.

Friendly language was also identified in the physical artefacts. A manager in the Arboretum explained they have a company slogan hung up in the building:

My logo which is everywhere, “if you see someone without a smile give them one of yours” ... you know by just a smile and a greeting ... not to make them feel like they have to buy anything so just they know you are approachable and you are a nice person and that is what is needed.

Language communicates the organisation values

The language used by employees communicates the organisations values. For instance, a manager in Autolaunch explains how innovation is key to their success:

I suppose to be honest it has to be driven by the quality of work we do, the speed of the work we do, the competitiveness of our work. Also, the innovations that we have come to and given to our customers ... so just being innovative, being the best we can be, one step ahead of the customer.

The language displayed in physical artefacts such as mission statements, employee handbooks, posters also communicate organisational values. For instance, in Autolaunch their mission statement was about, “supplying the customer with a quality product ...” whereas in Netwatch their mission statement was about “creating a fearless environment ... for our employees, for

customers, for our community”. A manager in Walsh Whiskey explains the importance of the employee handbook in communicating the culture:

Yes, I think so particularly when you start a new job you know every company has policies and procedures ... I think it is very important to get those on paper so when someone starts in a job they are aware of the expectation and they are aware of how things are done around here ... it's about understanding that there is a culture in the company and they are comfortable and they are a part of that.

In Netwatch they had a poster hanging on the wall in almost every room in the building. A manager explained that this poster was about how the organisation operated:

The Netwatch Way is how we operate it was designed by the staff members themselves coming together on a council ... we always work as a team and we always put the customer first, we never disrespect others and we never hide.

Language encourages employee cohesiveness

A cohesiveness among employees was evident in the language used by employees in the market oriented firms. For instance, a manager in the Arboretum illustrates the point:

... there is no I in team and we have a super team and we pride ourselves as 'our team' ... I think the human end of a business is just as important as the business end ... and the awards are the staff's ...

Another manager in Netwatch explained that employees believe in the company and feel a part of it:

There is a lot of employees here who just really believe in the company I think like a lot of us here feel part of it, like we feel like we built it for what it is and we are part of it and we really believe we are making a difference and that's really important.

In Walsh Whiskey a manager explained that: “all staff would get a sample of the product, so they can feel a sense of ownership”. She further added that: “this was important because it is all about the family and that sense of ownership”.

In summary, each market oriented firm had a uniqueness to its language, there was a customer focus to the language of employees, language was typically informal and friendly, communicated the values of an organisation and encouraged employee cohesiveness.

Discussion

The present research investigated the nature and influence of artefacts in market oriented firms, specifically four categories; stories, arrangements, rituals and language. The findings allow a number of conclusions to be drawn on the nature and influence of artefacts in market oriented firms.

The case study organisations had artefacts reflective of and in line with a market oriented culture. Thus market oriented values and the related norms of an openness in internal communications, quality, innovation, success, inter functional cooperation and appreciation of the employees (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000) were in evidence in the artefacts in the organisations. The artefacts embodied a market oriented culture.

Artefacts have a complimentary but unique function in a market oriented culture. Values are cognitive in nature, norms have a behavioural focus but artefacts are different. Artefacts are affective or emotional in nature - they can be felt. For example employees can feel the joy at a company celebration. Thus values, norms and artefacts in combination can be considered as having a combined cognitive, behavioural and affective influence on employees actions. Furthermore, artefacts can be physically touched, they can be heard, they can be said and seen; they can be experienced in a multi-sensory manner.

Each of the organisations investigated had multiple artefacts of each of the categories of artefacts. That is there was a multidimensional nature to artefacts. For example, multiple types of rituals or stories focused on the customer in each company. Thus it appears that artefacts similar to organisational values work in combination in creating a market orientation in an organisation (Harris, 1998; Gebhardt et al., 2006). This gives market oriented artefacts a synergistic effect or influence

Each category of artefacts across the organisations had a significant degree of similarity across companies in their function. For example, the four categories of artefacts across the organisations promoted the company values and similarly the four categories of artefacts across the organisations had a customer focus. Each category of artefact performed a similar function to each other category.

Artefacts in each organisation retained a uniqueness, reflective of the industry, history, competitive strategy and so on of the firm. Thus the mission statements, the stories and the language used in each organisation was unique. How a firm approaches the development of market orientation has previously been argued as context specific, linked to the organisational and environmental contingencies (Harris, 2002a). Thus while there was a significant degree of similarity in the function of the artefacts in contributing to a market oriented culture, each organisations individual artefacts still had a uniqueness.

All of the categories of the unique artefacts within each of the organisations had a similar message within each company. Thus an emphasis on quality was reflected in the language, stories and rituals in a company while being trustworthy was in evident in the artefacts across another company. In essence, each organisation's artefacts had a consistent and coherent meaning for the employees of the company.

Artefacts in each organisation are related to the specific values and norms in that organisation. For example, the values and related norms of a customer focus or quality or employee appreciation all appear to have related corresponding artefacts. Thus artefacts can be described as having a consistency with other artefacts but also a consistency with the values and norms.

Artefacts reinforce an organisation's values and norms. Artefacts developed to communicate and bring to life an organisation's values and norms have a reinforcing function. For example, quality as a value and associated norms of behaviour results in artefacts such as quality awards or quality guidelines further reinforcing the value of quality. Similarly, artefacts designed to reward and acknowledge appropriate behaviour are a stimulus for the behaviour to be repeated. Thus artefacts have a reinforcement function as well as role in influencing future organisational members actions or behaviours.

Artefacts appear to have a role in the creation of new values and related norms. Artefacts not only reinforce or communicate existing values and norms but also determine the values and norms of the organisation. For example, stories about the actions of significant employees appear to have an influence implicit or explicitly on values and ways of acting within the organisation going forward. Thus market oriented artefacts may according to this study be argued as an antecedent of market oriented culture. This challenges the traditional cultural approach to market orientation; values demonstrated by norms and observed through artefacts lead to market oriented behaviours (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000). It indicates an apparent underestimation of the importance of market oriented artefacts and the role that they may play in establishing a market oriented organisational culture. Furthermore, artefacts in their role creating new values and norms can be considered not only as an antecedent but as part of the inception of a market oriented organisational culture.

The influence of artefacts on market oriented behaviours should not be conceptualised in a linear way the traditional cultural approach to market orientation might suggest (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000). The evidence of artefacts as an antecedent and in the creation and reinforcing of values and norms as well as their influence on behaviours suggests collective models of conceptualising a market oriented culture may have more relevance (Hatch, 1993; Harris, 1998)

In summary, artefacts are a core element in a market oriented culture. Artefacts rather than having a subservient or modest role in a market oriented culture appear to have a significant influence or impact. Artefacts embody a market oriented culture in a multisensory, complimentary, multidimensional, synergistic, coherent, consistent and unique manner. Artefacts perform similar functions or purposes across market oriented companies in reinforcing and creating values, norms and behaviours as part of a collective market oriented culture. These findings develop a detailed understanding of the roles and functions of artefacts in a market oriented culture to aid its implementation. Artefacts are argued as part of the inception process, an antecedent and core to a market oriented culture

Implications

The implications of the research require managers to assess the degree to which they have developed and utilised market oriented artefacts. A plan of action can then be drawn up in order to proactively strengthen relevant artefacts for the organisation. Due to their easy to comprehend nature the implementation of relevant artefacts is likely to be a much more understandable and achievable approach for organisations in creating a market oriented culture.

If this action in implementing a market oriented culture is followed it may provide somewhat of a competitive advantage, ultimately enabling an organisation to “outperform” other organisations (Deshpandé and Farley, 2004, p. 5).

Limitations and future research

The challenges of undertaking MO research have been comprehensively documented nevertheless a number of limitations to the present research require documentation (Uncles, 2011).

The categories of artefacts investigated in this study are by no means a complete inventory of artefacts that exist in market oriented organisations. Hence, it is recommended that future studies should work to develop a more exhaustive categorisation. Related to this limitation in the scope, the research provides only part of the requirements for a company aiming to increase or establish a market orientation (van Raaij and Stoelhorst, 2008).

The use of the business awards list as a sampling frame for the study can be critiqued. However, the selection of market oriented companies was the aim and the awards list could thus be considered a pragmatic choice. This study sought information from relevant informants in each participating company thus future research could investigate the concept of market oriented artefacts using alternative research approaches including gathering data from customers themselves. The research findings can be argued as restricted to an Irish context. That said, it may be the case that some, if not all, of the research findings are internationally transferable. Nevertheless, future research of a similar nature should be undertaken in various geographical settings. The present research can be critiqued for allowing the case study organisations to proclaim their greatness. However, the initial selection of market oriented companies and the qualitative case study research approach including in some cases multi-informant interviews does provide a trustworthiness to the research. Finally, in an attempt to draw broadly generalisable conclusions from this particular study, no distinction was made between sectors or business-to-business versus business-to-consumer organisations during data analysis. Therefore, it may be beneficial for future researchers to adopt a more specific focus.

The core conclusion of this study is market oriented artefacts are core to market oriented culture. Managers should thus concentrate on developing and implementing relevant artefacts in embedding a market oriented organisational culture. A market oriented culture is strongly linked to positive organisational performance (Liao et al., 2011).

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