An examination of artefacts in market oriented firms

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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 perform similar functions across market oriented companies. They were found to be a core element of and embody a market oriented culture, retaining a uniqueness to each organisation in a multisensory, synergistic, consistent manner. Artefacts rather than having a subservient or modest role in a market oriented culture appear to have a significant influence in reinforcing and possibly creating the values, norms and behaviours of a market oriented culture.

Practical implications: To be a market oriented firm means implementing a market oriented culture. This paper 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 as an element of a market oriented culture.

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

Introduction

Being a market oriented makes sense; it enhances firm performance (Spillan et al., 2013). This relationship has been found to be consistent for small and medium sized enterprises as well as new entrepreneurial firms (Brettel et al., 2007; Beneke et al., 2016). To be a market oriented firm means implementing a market oriented culture (Lee at 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). The organisational culture layers (i.e. values, norms and artefacts) have been found to drive the market oriented behaviours in an organisation (Sheppard, 2011). Less hierarchical or linear models of a market oriented culture have also been supported with values, norms and artefacts argued as arranged in a more dynamic relationship enhancing the performance of the firm as a collective (Hatch, 1993; Lee et al., 2006).

What is clear is that artefacts are a key element or layer in a market oriented culture and thus in its implementation. Artefacts the "… phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels …" (Schein, 2006, p. 25) communicate the values that encourage market oriented practices (Griffiths and Grover, 1998), support the norms that produce market-oriented behaviours (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000) and are argued as strengthening the degree of market oriented behaviours in the organisation (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000 p. 452).

However, a deeper understanding of artefacts is required (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000; Farrell, 2005; Byrne, 2014; Tiernan, 2015). The focus on and detail of artefacts as an entity within a market oriented culture is limited and includes inconsistencies (Farrell, 2005). Thus the research seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the role of artefacts in a market oriented culture

Background

A definition of artefacts from an organisational culture perspective has been the subject of much literature (Gagliardi, 2017). 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. Schein's (2006) view of artefacts is supported by Higgins and Mcallaster (2004) who explain cultural artefacts are objects and behaviours that characterise one organisation as opposed to another. Higgins and Mcallaster (2004, p. 64) 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".

More specifically, four categories of market oriented artefacts have been proposed - stories, arrangements, rituals and language. These four categories of market-oriented artefacts reflect the organisational culture definitions provided although narrower in respect of the exclusion of values and norms; not being the focus of the present research as well as being addressed elsewhere in the marketing literature (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000; Gebhardt et al., 2006). Focusing on these four categories of artefacts is justified in that they have been identified as influencing the degree of market orientation in firms as well as playing 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 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 an outline of the 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 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 these might have produced a different result in the 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 better understood.

We do have some knowledge. There is significant organisational culture literature that includes a focus on 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 Pflessser (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 provide limited detail in the what and how of artefacts in this process. 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 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 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). While, 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.

Data was collected qualitatively using three research methods; document analysis, direct observation and interviews, enhancing its credibility (Yin, 2009).

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 were organisations who were nominated or won an Irish regional business awards competition and thus can be considered market oriented.

The research sample consisted of a purposive sample of six companies from the business awards competition who responded positively to an invitation to take part in the research. This 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, their websites screened for evidence of market orientation. Sole-traders and non-profit companies were excluded from selection as well as companies with less than 10 employees deemed to be possibly problematic in size to answer the research questions.

Where possible a multi-informant approach was taken to the interviews to allow a more complete 'gauge' in investigating market oriented 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. 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, documents were analysed such as the organisations' mission statements and employee handbooks. Field notes detailing data gathered were written-up following each site visit. See Table 1 for details of the companies and data collection.

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.

Table 1: Research sample and data collection

Findings

This section will present the research findings related to the four categories of market oriented artefacts. Artefacts were found to be customer focused, related to organisational values, encourage employee cohesiveness as well as indicate the value of employees.

Artefacts 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 Company Two stated that they have regular events such as, "bringing the customer out for the day … like it could be to a concert … a match or whatever". Equally, a manager from Company Four 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 …". Organisational meetings in market oriented firms similarly have a focus on customer related issues. For instance, a manager from Company One 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 Company Four explained that their quarterly meeting: "was based on [their] customer experience survey".

Language was found to have a customer focus in market oriented firms. Employees in market oriented firms speak about what they can do for customers. For instance, a manager in Company Four stated, "it's always about the customer and what we can do to make the customer's life easier". A manager in Company Two 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 okay for you? do you need anything from us? [are] 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.

A Company Two employee explained that it is not about the product they sell, it is 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 …

The 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 and she was in [the] commercial [department] … and she drove specifically up and she [went] out of her way to do that.

The following story shared by a manager in Company Two 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.

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 Company One explains how one 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.

Artefacts encapsulate organisational values

Rituals in market oriented firms communicate the organisations values. For example, a manager from Company Two 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 Company Four 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 Company Five, 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.

The language used by employees similarly communicates the organisations values. For instance, a manager in Company One outlines the values that are key to their company's 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 Company One their mission statement was about, "supplying the customer with a quality product …". In Company Two their mission statement was about "creating a fearless environment … for our employees, for customers, for our community". A manager in Company Six explains the importance of the employee handbook in communicating the culture:

> … 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 Company Two 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 company way:

> The [Company] Way is how we operate …. it was designed by the staff members themselves coming together on a council … [the poster says] 'We always work as a team and we always put the customer first, we never disrespect others and we never hide'.

Stories about the origins of the organisations and their founders were prevalent and appear to have had a cultural influence communicating the values. A manager in Company One 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 Company Six 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 Company Two 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 cultural 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 Company Two includes a photograph of each employee, their role in the organisation, on employee's awards and pictures of employees socialising at organisational events all indicating an appreciation of the employees. Organisational awards displayed similarly communicated the values of the organisations. These awards were displayed at reception areas and throughout the organisations. A manager from Company Three 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 Company Six 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".

Artefacts encourage employee cohesiveness

The arrangements in the market oriented firms encourage employee cohesiveness. 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 Company One explained that their open-plan office "breaks down barriers and everyone is kind of working together". A manager from Company Four explained that open-plan offices improve communications:

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

An open-door policy was outlined by a manager in Company Two. This open-door policy similarly 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 … 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 Company Six 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 Company Two 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".

Rituals aimed at encouraging cohesiveness among employees were evident in the market oriented firms. For instance, a manager in Company Two explained how cohesiveness can be built beginning at the employee induction stage:

> The … 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 Company Six 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 Company Six 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 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 Company Two 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, you know we are all fired up …

Similarly, a manager from Company Three explained that every employee in their organisation starts at 8.30. Additionally, a manager from Company Five explained that every morning, "employees would have what they call a huddle … 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".

A cohesiveness among employees was evident in the language used by employees in the market oriented firms. For instance, a manager in Company Five 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 Company Two 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 thats really important.

In Company Six 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".

Artefacts indicate employees are valued

Rituals reward employee behaviour. For instance, a manager in Company Four explained they have rewards for employees to say thank you to their fellow 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 Company Two explained that they reward employees:

> … 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 …

Rituals take place that indicate an appreciation of employees. For instance, a manager in Company Five 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 [racing] … we just do things to say thanks to the staff …

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

> [Celebrating] success would be based all around the social events and celebrating how [the company] is doing well. Barbecue days, communication days, employee of the year, family trips to … [fun parks], we do all that thing … [a fun park] was the family trip this year and we do all of that kind of social events.

The language in market oriented firms similarly indicates a people orientation. When employees in the firms communicated with each other the language used was typically informal and friendly. For instance, a manager in Company Three explained that when employees are referring 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 Company One 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 Company Two explained that their communications has an informal tone:

> … we would communicate stuff formally, but we have a very informal tone to the communications … [it] is like a family … we do a lot to build that culture of open door policy …

In Company Four a manager indicates that the friendly nature of internal communications impacts on the resulting 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 Company Five 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.

There is a culture of storytelling in the firms that indicates the value placed on employees. For example, a manager from Company Two explained that she had a story about almost every employee in the organisation: "… I could tell … 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 … 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 … 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].

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 organisations investigated were found to have artefacts that were market oriented. Thus the values, norms and behaviours of a market oriented culture such as an openness in internal communications, quality, innovation, success, inter-functional cooperation and an appreciation of employees (Homburg and Pflesser, 2000) were in evidence in the artefacts in the organisations. The artefacts of in the market oriented organisations embodied a market oriented culture.

Each category of artefacts (stories, arrangements, rituals and language) in each organisation had a similarity in its function across companies. Thus the four categories of artefacts across the organisations had a customer focus, promoted the organisational values, encouraged employee cohesiveness and indicate an appreciation of employees.

Each of the organisations investigated had multiple examples of each type of artefact with a similar focus. For example, multiple types of rituals or stories focused on the customer in each company and multiple rituals and arrangements in each company encouraging employee cohesiveness. Thus it appears that artefacts, similar to organisational values, may work in combination in creating a market orientation in an organisation (Harris, 1998; Gebhardt et al., 2006). There is a synergistic effect or influence.

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 the values and norms. So an emphasis on quality in an organisation was reflected in the language, stories and rituals in a company but also in the values and norms.

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 organisation's artefacts still had a uniqueness – a context specificness.

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 norm of behaviour results in artefacts such as quality awards or quality guidelines further reinforcing the value and norm 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 member's actions or behaviours.

Artefacts have a complimentary but unique function in a market oriented culture. Values are predominantly cognitive in nature, norms predominantly have a behavioural focus but artefacts are different. Artefacts are predominantly 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.

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 be argued as playing a part in creating a 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 as part of the inception process of a market oriented organisational culture. Thus 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 in the creation and reinforcing of values, norms and behaviours suggests collective models of conceptualising a market oriented culture have more relevance (Hatch, 1993; Harris, 1998)

In summary, artefacts are a core element in a market oriented culture. Artefacts perform similar functions or purposes across market oriented companies. Artefacts retaining a uniqueness to each organisation embody a market oriented culture in a multisensory, synergistic, consistent manner. Artefacts rather than having a subservient or modest role in a market oriented culture appear to have a significant influence or impact in reinforcing and possibly creating the values, norms and behaviours of a market oriented culture. A market oriented culture that can be understood as part of a collective dynamic process rather than linear. Artefacts are argued as part of the inception process and core to a market oriented culture. These findings develop a detailed understanding of not only the what but the how of artefacts in a market oriented culture.

Implications

To be a market oriented firm means implementing a market oriented culture (Brettel et al., 2007). The implications of the research require managers to assess the degree to which they have developed and utilised market oriented artefacts in the implementation of a market oriented culture. A plan of action can be drawn up in order to proactively strengthen relevant artefacts for an 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 research on market orientation 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. 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. Additionally, the present research could 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 a 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; Roach et al., 2014).

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