

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IMPORTANT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF MARKETING PROFESSIONALS

Tina Vukasovič  
International School for Social and Business Studies, Slovenia  
tina.vukasovic@mfdps.si

### **Abstract:**

The marketing discipline has in recent years greatly transformed. The marketing concept has been extended, deepened, the redefined and repositioned. In the last fifteen years, many authors point out that the marketing of a variety of factors occurred in the mature phase that is in crisis and that the marketing concept should be reviewed, evaluated and updated to reflect developments can be put into practice. Reasons for the changes are mostly changes in the business and the broader macroeconomic environment. Consumers are increasingly informed; they want customized products and services. Provide the necessary knowledge and skills in a time of change and seize the opportunities posed by climate change for the organization and marketing time is a major challenge. Marketing is not only based on talent, but mainly on knowledge and skills. This paper sets out to identify the knowledge and skills that marketing professionals need to possess and use, to improve marketing management and firm performance. The data from a survey, where marketing managers, academics and senior students in Slovenia took part, relating to the essential skills for working as a marketing manager, were analyzed by the analysis of variance in order to assess the extent of convergences or divergence among the responses of the three groups. In general we can say that marketing professionals appreciate the Slovenian and widely used marketing knowledge and skills. However, the academic marketing knowledge only is not enough for a successful work in the marketing department. For a successful transfer of knowledge into practice it is necessary to gain more skills.

*Keywords: knowledge management, marketing knowledge and skills, education, marketing management*

# 1. MARKETING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

## 1.1. Marketing knowledge

Marketing knowledge is the foundation of marketing discipline, but a general definition of marketing knowledge is difficult to establish (Rossiter, 2001, pp. 9). A detailed definition of marketing knowledge is very important for its further development. As early as 1988 the American Marketing Association (AMA) stated in its report that there was a lack of effort aimed at the systematic development of marketing knowledge and so it triggered a debate on the generation, transmission and use of marketing knowledge (Churchill *et al.*, 1988). Rossiter (2001) listed four types of marketing skills, namely: marketing concepts, structural frameworks, strategic and research guides. Later (Rossiter, 2002), on the initiative of his colleagues, a fifth form was added, namely empirical generalizations. According to his opinion, marketing knowledge is developed and expanded by academics and consultants, companies and managers. He assumed that the marketing knowledge is declarative ("know- what"), which means that it is based on facts, it is a separate entity and thus independent from the individual's ability to apply this knowledge in practice. From his definition of marketing knowledge he also excluded tacit knowledge (values, beliefs, ideas, experience), data and individual's ability or general mental ability respectively.

Following the publication of Rossiter's definition of marketing knowledge his writing was strongly criticized. He was blamed for (Rossiter (2001) limiting his definition too much, as certain forms of marketing knowledge such as empirical facts, generalizations, laws and theories (e.g. the theory of consumer behavior) (Uncles, 2002) were excluded from the definition. He was also criticized for not considering the knowledge on the implementation of marketing (McIntyre and Sutherland, 2002) and organizational skills and for limiting his definition to the academic marketing knowledge only, which is a synonym for so-called marketing science (Wierenga, 2002). Wierenga (2002, pp. 355 ) believed that "restricting the marketing knowledge to the academic marketing knowledge" is unnecessary and counter-productive and that in practice more than just encoded knowledge derived from systematic academic researches is available to marketing decision makers. He believed that the marketing science only (academic marketing knowledge), as a relatively young discipline, currently cannot provide a sufficient level of knowledge and guidance to marketing professionals for successful work in practice. Wierenga (2002, pp. 356) also define the marketing knowledge as: "All the insights and beliefs regarding marketing phenomenon used by marketing managers for the purposes of marketing decision-making." Marketing skills were then divided to the academic marketing knowledge and the skills used by marketing professionals in practice.

Wierenga identified the academic marketing knowledge similarly as Rossiter, but he added empirical generalization and knowledge that used by marketing professionals in practice. Wierenga believed that the marketing professionals have a lot of experience in practice, which deepens their expertise. In addition, mental models, although subjective, qualitative and incomplete, are available to them and nevertheless help them to identify and resolve problems. In practice, the marketing professionals solve problems in different ways and use a variety of skills, including the soft ones. Classification, developed by Wierenga and Van Bruggen (Wierenga, 2002, pp. 358), lists four ways of solving problems and decision-making, namely:

- Optimization, where the a marketing professional looks for the best possible solution;
- Ruling, where a marketing professional uses mental models;
- Searching for analogies/similarities, where the a marketing professional tries to remember a similar problem and the solutions from the past that helps him to solve a new problem;
- Creativity, where a marketing professional tries to find new ways of solving problems.

Each marketing professional decides on his own decision how he is going to solve a particular problem, as each individual has a different approach to the resulting problem. Often a combination of different ways is used. Optimization is definitely important, as well as similarity searching. From our perspective certainly all aspects are connected. In an organization the marketing knowledge is associated with the gaining, transmission and storage of information about customers, their preferences, competitors' products. It is generally believed that the marketing knowledge is useful in practice.

## 1.2. Marketing skills

Skills can be divided into professional and supporting ones. Professional ones are developed by using the expertise (skills of marketing planning, market segmentation, developing pricing strategies). Supporting skills can be used without expert knowledge. These skills can be used in different jobs. These skills include communication, interpersonal and decision-making (McCorkle *et al.*, 2003, pp. 197). Often, supporting skills are called managerial skills, because they contribute to the efficiency and flexibility of each individual. In an organization each individual should possess skills for working in a team and problem solving skills. Marketing professionals working in marketing, they should have the following skills:

- Communication skills (Young and Murphy, 2003, pp. 64) – we can talk about three types of communication skills, namely: 1. Speaking skills, ability to convince and active listening (public speaking, communication, ability to explain if any conflict arises, etc.). 2. Writing skills and ability to understand (writing reports, analyses, marketing plans, emails, etc.). 3. Collecting and analyzing information - information literacy (collecting data qualitatively and processing these data correctly, proper reading of information from tables and figures, etc.).
- Analytical skills - in reviewing the literature, it was found that individuals have under-developed analytical skills. Among the latter the ability to work with larger numbers, data, using various statistical tools, understanding data accuracy and reliability, ability of systematic thinking (Dacko, 2006, pp. 287) are included.
- Ability to use modern technology - particularly ability to impeccably use computer tools (Word, Excel, email, internet, social networks, R- commander, Power Point, etc.). It is important to know how using these tools can make work easier and how they can help in marketing business. A person, who knows how to use all the modern technology and, besides this, has strong analytical abilities, has significant competitive advantage in the job market (Stanton D' Auria, 2006, pp. 241)
- Interpersonal skills - are essentially needed in marketing, since a marketing professional operates in the internal as well as external environment of an organization. These skills are the following: understanding differences among individuals, working in a team and ability to solve problems.
- Leadership (Duke, 2002, pp. 207) – including predicting, strategic thinking, ability to motivate, delegating, leading various teams, ability to solve conflicts and crises.
- Ability to plan and organize – both are strongly associated with preparing and carrying out marketing plans. These skills include ability of systematical thinking, predicting, ability of time management, having a vision, etc.
- Decision making skills - it is important to back up a particular fact when making a decision. In decision making it is important to have ability to assess risks in a given situation.
- Creativity – it is essential for market functioning. It is used to identify a problem and in its practical solving. To successfully search creative solutions a reference frame and knowledge of problem solving is needed. All these must be supported by clear objectives.
- Many authors have previously stated what kind of knowledge and skills marketing professional should possess. If we want to highlight the most important abilities for marketing decision-making, a vision, creativity, leadership, communication skills, motivation, prudence, organizational skills, intuition, adaptability, analytical thinking, persistence, dedication, knowledge and acquaintance should be emphasized. It is also important that nowadays a marketing professional looks for relevant information important for his work. A marketing professional needs to quickly identify business trends and to respond to it immediately. A good marketing professional builds a good relationship with a marketing team and among departments in the whole organization. He proposes new ideas for marketing to his colleagues. In practice, use of certain skills depends on various environmental factors (size of an organization, activities, etc.). The essence of knowledge is knowledge of marketing communication, market research and analyzing as well as consumer behavior. A good marketing professional is more effective if he takes into account knowledge and skills he needs.

In Table 1 (Gray *et al.* (2007, pp. 280) definitions of the required knowledge and skills are summarized, because this list is one of the most comprehensive found in the literature reviewed. From the perspective of our environment and for the purpose of this article precisely this survey is the most interesting one, as it clearly defines and widely enough explains marketing expertise and skills. In comparison to other studies (usually carried out in the U.S.) the advantage has also been made in

New Zealand, a small open economy with strong European, Pacific and Asian links and is therefore somewhat more relevant to our situation.

**Table 1.** The definition of the necessary knowledge and skills for marketing professionals

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS
Strategic marketing	A willingness to learn
International and export marketing	Teamwork skills
Business to business marketing	Oral communications skills
Consumer behavior	Written communications skills
Product and brand management	The skills to plan their own work
Pricing	Problem solving ability
Market research and analysis	Self-confidence
Personal selling and sales management	Independent judgement
Societal and Ethical issues in marketing	The ability to be creative
Innovation and new product development	The skills to implement change
Services Marketing	A multy-disciplinary perspective
Marketing logistics/distributionogistics	Analytical skills
Marketing communications	Flexibility and adaptability
Retail marketing and management	An awareness of ethical issues
Direct marketing	Strong interpersonal skills
Internet marketing	

Source: Gray *et al.*, 2007, 280.

Table I shows knowledge and skills that a marketing professional should possess according to Gray *et al.* (2007). A good marketing professional is more effective when taking into account knowledge and skills needed for his work. Of course, it is important to having already developed certain skills. Some skills are gained over a certain period of time when a marketing professional is in business for a long time.

In the next section, relevant previous researches that have been focused on managers, educators and/or students are reviewed. Then the research methodology is discussed and our findings are presented, together with their implications.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

### 2.1. Methodology, data collection and sample

It was decided that a questionnaire-based survey would be the most appropriate way to gather primary data, as it would allow a comparison of the opinions of samples of marketing managers, academics and students. The questionnaire for business respondents was distributed by e-mail to a single respondent in each firm, generically described as the “marketing manager”. Usable questionnaires were received from 65 businesses. Third and fourth year marketing students at the different faculty in Slovenia received a shorter version of the questionnaire, excluding the section relating to managers’ knowledge and skills. Usable questionnaires were received from 58 marketing students. The questionnaire for students respondents was also distributed by e-mail. Additionally, faculty members were asked to distribute a version of the questionnaire throughout their departments. Completed returns were received from 15 marketing academics. The questionnaire for marketing academics respondents was also distributed by e-mail. Total sample size was 138. All data were analyzed using SPSS version 12.0. Results are presented as simple means and percentages, so as to aid comparison between groups of different sample sizes. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to assess whether any differences between the mean ratings (as opposed to

rankings) of skills and knowledge areas by each group were statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level. Additionally, the Scheffe and Tukey post hoc tests were applied to the results, to verify conclusions.

The profile of respondents shows that 45% of the managers who responded had spent up to five years in their current positions, almost half of the having the title marketing manager. More than 75% held university qualifications, 20% per cent at bachelor's degree level and 15% per cent post-graduate. The largest proportion worked in communications, followed in fast moving consumer goods, retail, food products, finance and banking and professional services. The student sampling frame comprised the third year of the bachelor's degree, fourth and final year of the honours degree and first year of the master's and second year of the doctoral's degree, all at the different faculties in Slovenia. 60% of the faculty members who responded had been teaching marketing four up to eight years. The most common teaching areas were general marketing, consumer behavior and brand management accounting for around a half of the total each.

## 2.2. Research hypotheses

Based on the secondary data collected in the literature, the following hypotheses have been formed:

- H1: The most important skills among the overall skills areas in the work of marketing professionals are "Strong interpersonal communication skills", "A Willingness to learn", "Problem solving ability", "Written communications skills", "Ability of creative thinking" and "Ability to teamwork".
- H2: The most important knowledge areas for a successful work of a modern marketing professional are marketing communication, product and brand management, consumer behavior and strategic marketing.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. The importance of skills areas for successful work of marketing professionals

Marketing managers, students and academics were all asked to rate how essential a wide variety of skills were for successful work of marketing professionals on a scale from 5 = "essential" to 1 = "not essential". The results are presented in Table II. Academics and managers agree that strong interpersonal communication skills and willingness to learn are the most important skills that marketing professionals should possess. They ranked teamwork and written communication skills as third and fourth most important skills. These rankings are in line with many of the previous studies of graduates' marketing and business skills cited in Gray *et al.* (2007). Students also rated strong interpersonal communication skills and willingness to learn relatively highly, but thought teamwork was the most important skill. Problem solving and ability of creative thinking were rated on fourth and fifth. Comparing their rankings with those of employers and academics suggests that more emphasis should be placed on the development of written communication skills, in particular. Based on the presented results in Table II the hypothesis 1 was confirmed. It is clear that there are significant differences in the views of the three groups as to how essential a number of skills are. Marketing managers consider a willingness to learn to be more important than students do, while both managers and academics rate written communication skills significantly higher. For their part, students place significantly greater emphasis than academics and managers on teamwork, self-confidence, ability of creative thinking, multi-disciplinary perspective, awareness of ethical issues, and the ability to use modern technology. Similar views were held by all three groups about the strong interpersonal communication skills, flexibility and adaptability, accountability and responsibility, problem solving, analytical skills, the ability to motivate and inspire others and the ability to plan their own work. It is worth noting that there appear to be few differences in the perceptions of marketing managers and marketing academics. This suggests that academics and managers share beliefs about the importance of the softer and harder skills that graduates require. One could assume, then, that academics would build the development of these skills into their undergraduate courses.

**Table 2.** The importance of skills areas for successful work of marketing professionals

Skills for marketing graduates	Mean responses			Post hoc test results Differences*
	Marketing managers	Students	Academics	
Strong interpersonal communication skills	4.75 (0.57)	4.61 (0.75)	4.68 (0.58)	None
A willingness to learn	4.65 (0.65)	4.53(0.71)	4.64 (0.68)	M>S*
Written communication skills	4.53 (0.68)	3.85 (0.79)	4.56 (0.69)	M. A> S*
Problem solving ability	4.25 (0.62)	4.50 (0.71)	4.22 (0.72)	None
Flexibility and adaptability	4.22 (0.70)	4.25 (0.70)	4.10 (0.88)	None
The ability of creative thinking	4.27 (0.80)	4.48 (0.76)	4.15 (0.72)	S>M, A*
Ability to teamwork	4.55 (0.75)	4.65 (0.61)	4.57 (0.82)	S>M, A*
Strategic to think and plan	4.24 (0.55)	3.82 (0.65)	4.12 (0.64)	M>S*
Accountability and responsibility	4.18 (0.77)	3.79 (0.53)	3.99 (0.66)	None
The ability to motivate and inspire others	4.20 (0.66)	3.81 (0.89)	4.0 (0.44)	None
Skills to plan their own work	4.15 (0.70)	3.76 (0.74)	3.97 (0.85)	None
Multi-disciplinary perspective	4.10 (0.81)	4.15 (0.79)	3.95 (0.95)	S>M, A*
An awareness of ethical issues	3.89 (0.89)	3.72 (0.77)	3.33 (0.99)	S>M, A*
Ability to use modern technology	3.81 (0.91)	3.87 (0.64)	3.85 (0.75)	S>M, A*
Analytical skills	3.75 (0.87)	3.76 (0.76)	3.79 (0.91)	None
Self-confidence	3.69 (0.66)	3.70 (0.88)	3.65 (0.77)	S>M, A*

Note: \* Significant at 95 per cent confidence level; M – marketing managers; S – students; A – academics; figures which are given in parentheses are standard deviations

We find that here as in the rest of the world valued slightly higher than the overall ability of specific marketing skills and knowledge. This fact is a bit of concern, as it is for some authors found (McCole, 2004), that there is a lack of recognition capability, which would be specific for marketing. Higher than normal in the (foreign) research falling overall socio-ethical views, such as reliability, responsibility, ethics indicating an awareness that marketing professionals have in their work and in contact with consumers. Among the least important were ranked as more specific knowledge and skills in the field of marketing. Compared with foreign research are primarily low grade knowledge on customers (to provide consumer behavior, using a database of customers), which represents a potential weakness Slovenian marketing professionals. We find, therefore, that marketing professionals are seen as particularly important general skills are less important analytical skills. In the future, when the market has become more analytical and measurable results, you may experience difficulties in adapting to these changes. It can also be a problem ignorance of consumers and evaluating knowledge and skills in the field of knowledge of consumers as unimportant. Focusing on the customer is becoming increasingly important, and his lack of knowledge can lead to poor performance of the company.

### 3.2. The importance of knowledge areas for successful work of marketing professionals

Respondents were asked to rank the top three knowledge areas. Managers and academics rated marketing communications most highly, followed by product and brand management and consumer behavior. Students ranked strategic marketing first, followed by marketing communications, consumer behavior, product and brand management and innovation and new product development. The variation in rankings across the groups seen in Table IV suggest that marketing managers place strong emphasis on marketing communications, product and brand management, consumer behavior, international and export marketing, business-to-business marketing, strategic marketing and public relations marketing. Academics, on the other hand, emphasize marketing communications, product and brand management, consumer behavior, international and export marketing, business-to-business

marketing and personal selling and sales management. Students place strong emphasis on strategic marketing, and consumer behavior. Based on the presented results in Table IV the hypothesis 2 was confirmed.

**Table 3.** The importance of knowledge areas for successful work of marketing professionals

Knowledge areas	Marketing managers	Mean responses		
		Students	Academics	Post hoc test results Differences*
Marketing communications	4.45 (0.95)	4.46 (0.76)	4.43 (0.89)	None
Product and brand management	4.37 (0.88)	4.39 (0.77)	4.38 (0.79)	S > M*
Consumer behavior	4.15 (0.76)	4.45 (0.55)	4.35 (0.75)	S > M*
Strategic marketing	3.85 (0.93)	4.57 (0.70)	3.99 (0.99)	S > M, A*
International and export marketing	3.99 (1.03)	4.15 (0.95)	4.10 (0.96)	S > A > M*
Business to business marketing	3.95 (0.77)	4.10 (0.75)	3.91 (0.78)	None
Public relations	3.89 (0.66)	3.99 (0.34)	3.78 (0.69)	None
Pricing	3.39 (1.06)	3.86 (0.78)	3.40 (0.97)	S > M, A*
Market research and analysis	3.37 (0.78)	3.94 (1.77)	3.35 (0.83)	None
Personal selling and sales management	3.33 (1.19)	3.84 (0.79)	3.79 (0.96)	S. A > M*
Societal and Ethical issues in marketing	3.29 (1.04)	3.78 (0.74)	3.20 (1.19)	S > A*
Innovation and new product development	3.28 (0.99)	4.35 (0.75)	3.17 (0.77)	S > M, A *
Services Marketing	3.27 (1.11)	3.69 (0.74)	3.55 (0.91)	None
Marketing logistics/distribution	3.21 (0.96)	3.68 (0.76)	3.45 (0.85)	S > M, A *
Retail marketing and management	3.20 (0.99)	3.75 (0.77)	3.38 (0.68)	S > A > M*
Direct marketing	3.18 (0.86)	3.44 (0.88)	3.15 (0.76)	None
Internet marketing	3.15 (1.05)	3.35 (1.15)	3.10 (1.18)	None

Note: \* Significant at 95 per cent confidence level; M – marketing managers; S – Students; A – Academics; figures which are given in parentheses are standard deviations

Taken in tandem, the results presented in Tables III and IV suggest that academics should place slightly more emphasis on the key knowledge areas that employers value, and which appear to reflect current market conditions. However, a necessary caveat is that academics who teach undergraduate students must also be aware that they are training future managers and not just future marketing assistants. Thus, it is also important to take note of the essential knowledge and skills that managers require (Gray et al., 2007).

The results of our study are very similar to the results of the market research “Role of communication and marketing in companies in Slovenia in 2006”, conducted under the auspices of the Institute of Marketing, Faculty of Economics (Hosta, 2008) and the market research carried out in New Zealand by Gray et al. 2007. The comparison of the results of both of the researches carried out, it can be said that in marketing area in Slovenia the current state of marketing knowledge and skills has not significantly changed in the last few years.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

We live in a time when change (technological, political, economic, demographic backgrounds) takes place with great speed and has to be adjusted at each step. The company has raised the challenge of change with the knowledge to manage effectively. Knowledge by itself has no value, it must be appropriate to use and organize. In describing the necessary and relevant knowledge and skills of modern marketers we must not forget that marketing practices and the role of marketing in any organization is somewhat different. Creation of a single list of necessary marketing skills is therefore quite complicated offense. This study is one of the most comprehensive empirical investigations to date of the capabilities that marketers require to be successful in the twenty-first century. Based on the

literature review and the research carried out we can conclude that only academic marketing knowledge is not enough for successful work in the marketing department. It is necessary to win more skills to be successful transfer of knowledge into practice. Individuals in the workplace depend on the characteristics of the organization that may prevent/promote its development and use his skills and abilities. In addition to knowledge and skills in today's unstable and unpredictable environment is also important to the broader understanding of the systems around us and understanding of the complexity of the relationships that are created within these systems. The study could easily be replicated in other countries and other institutions for assessing the generalisability of the results. Efforts should be made to increase sample sizes of managers, students and academics. More research is also required to investigate whether experience alone is sufficient for well-trained junior marketers to acquire the extra knowledge and skills they require to become effective marketing managers, or if marketing academics should be helping them to fast-track their careers by the provision of targeted courses.

## REFERENCES

1. Churchill, A. G., Garda, A. R., Hunt, D. S., Webster, E. F. (1988). Developing, Disseminating and Utilizing Marketing Knowledge. *Journal of Marketing*, 52(4), 1–25.
2. Dacko, G. S. (2006). Narrowing the Skills Gap for Marketers of the Future. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 24(3), 283–295.
3. Duke, R. C. (2002). Learning Outcomes: Comparing Student Perceptions of Skill Level and Importance. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 24(3), 203–217.
4. Gray, J. B., Ottesen, G. G., Bell, J., Chapman, C., Whiten, J. (2007). What are the Essential Capabilities of Marketers? *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 25(3), 271–295.
5. Hosta, M. (2008), *Znanja in sposobnosti sodobnega tržnika* (diplomsko delo). Ljubljana: Ekonomska fakulteta.
6. McCorkle, E. D., Alexander, F. J., Reardon, J., in Kling, D. N. (2003). Developing Self-Marketing Skills: Are Marketing Students Prepared for Job Search? *Journal of Marketing Education*, 25(3), 196–207.
7. McIntyre, H. S., Sutherland, M. (2002). A Critical Analysis Into the Accumulation of Marketing Knowledge at the Level of the Firm, *Marketing Theory*, 2(4), 403–418.
8. McCole, P. (2004). Refocusing Marketing to Reflect Practice: The Changing Role of Marketing for Business, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 22(5), 531–539.
9. Rossiter, R. J. (2001). What is Marketing Knowledge? Stage I: Forms of Marketing knowledge. *Marketing Theory*, 1(1), 9–26.
10. Rossiter, R. J. (2002). The Five Forms of Transmissible, Usable Marketing Knowledge. *Marketing Theory*, 2(4), 369–380.
11. Stanton D'Auria, A. (2006). Bridging the Academic/Practitioner Divide in Marketing. An undergraduate Course in Data Mining. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 24(3), 233–244.
12. Uncles, M. (2002). From Marketing Knowledge to Marketing Principles. *Marketing Theory*, 2(4), 345–353.
13. Wierenga, B. (2002). On Academic Marketing Knowledge and Marketing Knowledge that Marketing Managers Use for Decision-Making. *Marketing Theory*, 2(4), 355–362.
14. Young, R. M., Murphy, J. W. (2003). Integrating Communications Skills Into the Marketing Curriculum: A case study", *Journal of Marketing Education*, 25(1), 57–71.