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Functional top management teams and marketing organization: exploring strategic decision-making

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ABSTRACT

Marketers play an integral part in the strategic planning process of a firm, both concerning the role of marketing in the strategic discourse, as well as the marketers' interaction between various levels of hierarchy within an organization. The top management team (TMT) formulates strategic decision and influences the implementation of tactical approaches. Organizations often also mirror their TMT. Organizational strategy plays a critical role in the marketing capability of an organization, as activities are decided based on strategy and organizational goals. A TMT needs to be structurally composed in such a way that the firm is functionally positioned to respond and adapt to challenges in the marketplace continuously. With this in mind, the paper develops a conceptual representation of the interface between marketing organization, strategic decision-making, functional TMTs, and organizational structure. We conceptually assess the impact of functional TMT composition on marketing organization and corporate-level strategy alignment. Our research question focuses on how functional TMT composition and decision-making impacts marketing organization and overall market orientation. At the crossroads between strategic organizational decision-making and leadership, the upper echelon theory and contingency theory serves as the theoretical foundations from which conceptual propositions are developed in the context of marketing organization and market orientation.

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Functional TMT; strategic decision making; marketing organization; organizational structure; market orientation

Is marketing a specific function with general applicability or a general function that is specifically applied?

Bartels (1974, p. 73)

1. Introduction

Marketing is a vehicle to drive firm performance (Bolton, 2004; Nath et al., 2010) and an essential aspect in the firm's strategic planning process (Hutt et al., 1988). Marketing necessitates a sufficient understanding of the interorganizational and broader environmental opportunities and threats, as well as mediates the capability to continuously adapt

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(Moorman & Day, 2016). This is of strategic importance, as adaptation is necessary for firm sustainability and survival (Abatecola et al., 2016; Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985) and, adaptation can be designed by strategic choice (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1985; Miles et al., 1978). Issues requiring strategic direction are often complex (Mason & Mitroff, 1981), and necessitate the appropriate deployment of firm resources to turn the direction into competitive advantage (Slotegraaf et al., 2003). Strategic flexibility, in turn, additionally supports firm agility to adapt in competitive environments (Grewal & Tansuhaj, 2001).

Organizational strategy thus guides the creation of a unique and valuable position for the firm (Porter, 1996), and, creating and executing a successful marketing strategy is pivotal for firm performance (Atuahene-Gima & Murray, 2004; Lehman, 2004; Matsuno & Mentzer, 2000). As an inseparable element of organizational strategy, the leadership of a firm needs to be structurally composed in such a way that the firm is functionally positioned to continuously respond and adapt to challenges in the marketplace. While marketing can be viewed as an organizational capability (Krush et al., 2015; Webster et al., 2005), marketing as a function is organized differently across firms (Workman et al., 1998). Different organizational and market environments require different organizational approaches to fulfill their highly strategic potential (Fiedler, 1964, 1981), and there is a general consensus that there is no single best way to functionally organize a firm. It remains key, however, to understand and analyze how marketing, strategic thinking, and the leadership which guides this can be organized in a way that is advantageous to the firm.

Marketing organization is expected to play a critical role in informing organizational strategy. The TMT, tasked with strategic decision-making, is the key directing entity which sets the strategic direction. The marketing capability of an organization is shaped by the leadership, as activities are decided based on strategy and organizational goals (Porter, 1996). With this in mind, this paper aims to aid in providing insights related to how firms can be organized to ensure marketing excellence and successful strategy formulation and execution. To address this, the research question guiding the paper focuses on how functional TMT composition and decision-making impacts on marketing organization and overall corporate-level strategy. Exploring this area of strategic leadership with a marketing lens contributes toward a space identified by Lee et al. (2015), who, in synthesizing the literature of organizational structure and its effects on achieving marketing objectives, identified that there is scant research related to the effects of organizational structure on marketing objectives. Specifically, for understanding the interplay between organizational elements, including leadership and structure. This presents an opportunity for exploration, as members of a TMT exert influence and are involved in strategic decision-making (Moorman & Day, 2016). The TMT thus needs to be composed to functionally facilitate continuous response and adaptation to challenges in the marketplace.

The paper continues as follows: literature relating to two specific theoretical frameworks within strategic organizational decision-making in the context of TMT is reviewed, and the key constructs are contextually defined. Thereafter, a conceptual representation of the interface between the constructs is presented and five conceptual propositions are proposed. Finally, managerial and academic implications are discussed and, limitations and suggestions for future research are identified.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The interface between strategic decision-making and functional TMT

2.1.1. Upper echelon theory

Extant literature on strategic decision-making in organizations has highlighted the effect of behavioral factors on TMTs and their performance (Colbert et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2017). This aligns with the upper echelon theory, as proposed by Hambrick and Mason (1984). The theory posits that firm performance is partially predicted by the background, values, and cognition that the individuals in the leadership team (upper echelon) bring to the firm. How the TMT thus interprets situations and make decisions is primarily influenced by their own experiences, values, and personalities. This infers that the organization reflects its top management – as these managers view things through their own unique lens. The unique background characteristics of the strategic decision makers impact strategic planning activities (Grewal & Tansuhaj, 2001).

The past twenty years have seen significant developments in the view and role of the TMT, for example, from CEO/CFO only to a broad C-suite. The traditional role of Chief Marketing Officer has also broadened to new dispersed functional TMT members in industry and literature, with titles such as Chief Brands Officer, Chief Commercial Officer, Chief Customer Officer, and Chief Merchandising Officer. Table 1 provides an overview of the most notable studies over the past twenty years. Research on functional TMT members is, however, a more nascent area with many unexplored facets (Menz, 2012). The focus here, is thus on how the composition and functional role of the TMT

Table 1. An overview of extant areas of research on TMT members and their roles.

Area of research on TMT members and their roles	Authors and year
Introduction and refinement of upper echelon theory: influence of factors relating to age, functional role, socioeconomic background, group homogeneity, and TMT decision-making under different conditions	Hambrick and Mason (1984); Hambrick (2007)
Synthesize of literature on functional TMT	Menz (2012); Cannella et al. (2008)
The shift from focusing mainly on the CEO to the extended leadership within organizations as a predictor of firm performance	Finkelstein et al. (2009); Menz (2012); Nath and Mahajan (2008)
Review of the role top executives have in creating organizational outcomes	Carpenter et al. (2004)
Association of TMT leadership and personality with organizational effectiveness	Colbert et al. (2014)
CMO presence as antecedent to market orientation	Brower and Nath (2018)
Examination of TMT role Chief Financial Officer (CFO)	Geiger and North (2006); Han et al. (2015); Uhde et al. (2017)
Examination of TMT role Chief Operations Officer (COO)	Chaffin et al. (2014); Hambrick & Cannella (2004); Zhang (2006)
Examination of TMT role Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)	Nath and Mahajan (2008); Nath and Mahajan (2017)
Examination of TMT role Chief Information Officer (CIO)	Enns et al. (2003); Preston et al. (2008); Preston and Karahanna (2009)
Examination of TMT role Chief Officer of Corporate Social Responsibility	Strand (2013)
Assessing the influence of demographic differences between the CEO and other TMT members	Ling et al. (2015)
Top management team functional background diversity and firm performance	Cannella et al. (2008)
TMT relation to conflict	Amason and Sapienza (1997); Ensley et al. (2002)
TMT relation to venture performance	Amason (1996); Ensley et al. (2002); Hambrick and D'Aveni (1992)

affect the organizational strategy and resultant outcomes, with Hambrick noting that 'leadership of a complex organization is a shared activity' (Hambrick, 2007, p. 334).

2.1.2. Contingency theory

The contingency theory contends that the best way to lead and organize the management structures of an organization is dependent on the nature of the environment to which the organization must relate (Fiedler, 1981; Morgeson et al., 2010). This assertion is supported by earlier theorists (e.g., Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967), who highlight the impact of contingency factors on organizational structure. This theory centers around the notion that companies represent open systems, which continuously facilitate interaction between internal environments (e.g., leadership styles, firm strategy, structure) and external environments (e.g., competition, suppliers, economy, regulation, technological changes). This necessitates continual adaptation of the organization's internal approaches to external conditions, to ensure alignment and firm performance. There is thus no one size fits all solution as different environments would require different organizational approaches. This is of interest in the field of strategic decision-making conducted by a firm's TMT, as these decisions inform overall organizational direction and directly influence firm performance.

Strategy decisions are in anticipation of, and reaction to, environmental challenges. Organizational structures and their changing configurations generally attempt to use internal resources to effectively address the expected or evolving firm reality. To conceptually enunciate the strategic, mediating role of functional TMTs between the marketing organization and the market orientation of a firm, the following section draws on extant literature to define the various constructs. Particular emphasis is placed on the internal, organizational structure which comprises the functional TMT within a firm.

3. Marketing organization and market orientation: the strategic (mediating) role of functional top management teams

Marketing organization is defined as the intersection between a firm and its markets and operationally denotes the function where the work of marketing gets done (Moorman & Day, 2016). Functionally, marketing organization serves as a corporate link between customers and the organizational entities (Schlegelmilch & Chini, 2003), by facilitating the creation of value through transferring the knowledge of customer insight into meaningful products or services. Literature asserts that marketing organization plays a critical role in the attainment of marketing excellence (Moorman & Day, 2016), meaning, the superior ability of a firm to accomplish vital customer-facing activities which improve customer, financial, the stock market, and societal objectives. Marketing excellence aims to improve customer and financial performance outcomes (Moorman & Day, 2016) and the organizational benefits of marketing excellence are plentiful (e.g., Berry et al., 1991; Moorman & Day, 2016).

Organizational change and leadership are concepts that are often studied within the context of strategic management, yet less frequently within the confines of marketing (Ozuem et al., 2016). This presents both an opportunity and a potential void within the marketing discourse, as a more comprehensive grasp of leadership beyond only the board of directors is critical to foster a better understanding of marketing-oriented

organizations. Furthering this understanding continues to be a focus, as the marketing journey has not been without its challenges. Forty-five years ago, Robert Bartels argued that marketing was experiencing a crisis of identity. The marketing concept ushered in a more prominent role for the marketer in the organizational structure, yet, a more broadened interdisciplinary approach to management was nascent (Bartels, 1974).

Fast-forward to 2005, Webster, Malter, and Ganesan argued that marketing competence was in decline: 'in many organizations, the corporate marketing function has lost budget, headcount, influence, and confidence, resulting in strategic consequences that run deeper than many senior managers may realize. The question is not how to rebuild the marketing center but how to disperse marketing competence across the organization.' (p. 35). The role of marketing, and associated marketing organization, is of focal interest in this context. Hutt et al. (1988) highlight marketers' integral role in the strategic planning process, including the role of marketing in strategic discourse in particularly large and complex firms, as well as marketers' interaction between various levels of hierarchy within an organization. Jarratt and Fayed (2001) support this assertion, by underlining the role of marketing in facilitating the exchange of information among functional areas within an organization.

Many organizations' leadership teams leverage marketing frameworks and market-led risk assessment to create a business strategy (Simkin & Dibb, 2012). Concomitantly, marketing organization executes activities to, for example, support the anticipation of market changes, adopt a strategy for competitive advantage, attract resources, and, align and effectively implement marketing strategy (Moorman & Day, 2016). Marketing as an organizational capability allows an organization's TMT to leverage marketing capabilities and create a strategy which is executed by marketing activities (Brower & Nath, 2018; Matsuno & Mentzer, 2000). Additionally, leadership is a driving factor for firm adaptation and performance. The TMT of an organization provides leadership, including in the marketing sphere. For our work, we leverage the definition as proposed by Menz (2012, p. 46) to define functional TMT as 'senior executives in the TMT responsible for one or more functional areas in their organizations.' The TMT is formed by key strategic decision makers of a firm, tasked with making strategic choices and setting the overarching strategic direction of the firm (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Its members create the firm environment (Atuahene-Gima & Ko, 2001), play an important role in creating organizational outcomes (Carpenter et al., 2004) and functional implementation (Choi, 2002), with the quality of strategic decisions influencing organizational performance (Amason, 1996). Leadership is of importance for the performance of marketing strategy, with strategic leadership shaping the marketing capability by setting direction (Grewal & Tansuhaj, 2001; Moorman & Day, 2016).

There has been a shift of focus from the CEO as a predictor of firm performance to an increasing interest in the extended leadership team (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2009). This change in approach has received scholarly attention through different empirical studies, including the influence of age, functional role, socioeconomic background, and group homogeneity on TMT decision-making (Hambrick & Mason, 1984); the role of top executives in creating organizational outcomes (Carpenter et al., 2004); the association between TMT leadership and personality on organizational effectiveness (Colbert et al., 2014); and CMO presence as an antecedent to market orientation (Brower & Nath, 2018).

Mirroring contingency theory's notion that the best way to lead and organize the organization is dependent on the nature of the environment the organization finds itself in (Fiedler, 1964), marketing is organized differently across firms (Workman et al., 1998). The marketing function provides accountability for market orientation activities and its level of influence is positively related to market orientation (Verhoef & Leeflang, 2009). Over time there has been increased interest in the cross-functional relationship of marketing across an organization as well as how to structurally organize to achieve marketing excellence. To synthesize, Workman et al. (1998) present a framework which links dimensions of marketing organization to both situational and contextual factors. The authors categorize dimensions into structural and nonstructural. Structural dimensions include organizational structuring factors (e.g., reporting relationships) and bureaucratic dimensions (e.g., formalization, standardization, and centralization). Nonstructural dimensions include the use of cross-functional teams and flexible organizational forms that can easily and quickly adapt to change (Day, 1994). To achieve these objectives, strategic decision-making is imperative (Nath & Mahajan, 2011).

Traditionally, companies have been divided into functional or multidivisional structures (Lee et al., 2015). Activities and employees divided into functional structures are organized into groups based on the functions that they fulfill within the organization (Habib & Victor, 1991), whereas divisional structuring creates smaller, separate groups with the mandate of fulfilling multiple functions, e.g., division based on products, geography, or customers (Lee et al., 2015). Also, Hambrick et al. (2015) suggest there is a major difference between divisional and functional structures: divisions can act independently, having very little interaction with one another, whereas a functional structure enables interaction and cooperation. The functional structure creates a greater sense of horizontal interdependence, where the members affect and are affected by each other. Previous studies propose that the organizational structure should be in line with the overall strategy to ensure top performance – what that structure should be is not straightforward to determine.

Chen et al. (2019) suggest that since functional executives are in charge of implementing strategies, they also have a holistic view of the firm, an understanding of the development of the strategy on different levels within the firm. Therefore, functional executives can provide important input into the TMT, which should be considered in team composition. There has also been a trend in executive team composition, going towards more functional managers (Guadalupe et al., 2014). General management has however not been replaced, but rather, the number of people who serve on the TMT has increased (Guadalupe et al., 2014) and the reliance on them has broadened (Cannella et al., 2008). Guadalupe et al. (2014) identify a growing centralized decision-making trend. The authors argue that although business units have autonomy over certain areas within the organization, the majority of the decision-making power is still concentrated with the top managers, which Caruana et al. (1998) identified to fall more specifically within the ambit of functional managers.

More recently, Lee et al. (2015) suggest that organizations adapt to an organizational structure with a marketing perspective, which ideally revolves around customer value maximization. According to Lee et al. (2015), the structure in the context of marketing literature has the objective to “effectively link employees to customers (how units inside of the firm collaborate with customers).” This stands in contrast to the management literature, which

proposes that structure should be viewed through the eyes of product success and management control (Lee et al., 2015). Lusch and Webster (2011) as well as Verhoef and Leeflang (2009) affirm that the marketer represents the customer’s voice, which redefines their role as one of strategic value. The following sections present a review of the literature, which delineates the various above-mentioned constructs and develops them into conceptual propositions. (Figure 1 below provides an overview). (p. 88)

3.1. The structure of functional TMTs

The individual members of a management team are interdependent with a united purpose of providing enterprise leadership (Wageman & Hackman, 2010). The TMT is tasked with formulating the firm’s corporate strategy by mapping out strategic decisions to address the firm’s goals including, for example, product-market entry/exit and the allocation of resources (Jarratt & Fayed, 2001). All members in the TMT exert some level of influence and are involved in these decision-making processes (Moorman & Day, 2016). The TMT, therefore, needs to be structurally composed in such a way that the firm is functionally positioned to respond and adapt to challenges in the marketplace continuously. Much research has assessed how organizational structure is aligned with firm strategy and the market. Vorhies and Morgan (2005) suggest that the fit of a firm’s strategy type to its marketing organization structural characteristics (specialization, formalization, centralization) and task characteristics improves the firm’s’ marketing efficiency and effectiveness.

Functional TMT members generally represent a specific organizational function such as finance, marketing, or strategy (Menz, 2012). Different compositions of functional TMT members exists, with different functional executive roles represented in the TMT (Finkelstein et al., 2009; Nath & Mahajan, 2011). To be successful, functional TMT members must be committed to a strategic decision and its implementation (Amason, 1996; Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Menz, 2012). Effective implementation of strategic decisions requires team members to actively cooperate (Child, 1972), as positive affective

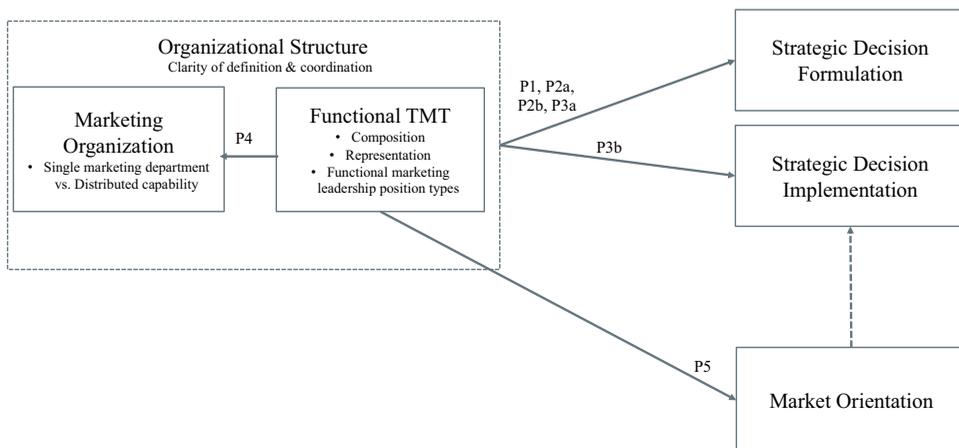


Figure 1. Conceptual representation of the interface between strategic decision-making, functional TMTs, market orientation, and marketing organization.

relationships in TMTs are needed to sustain the production and implementation of strategic decisions (Amason, 1996). Suboptimal decision-making and an inability to identify and adapt to external trends may negatively impact firm performance (Ozuem et al., 2016), and as such, the cognitive capabilities and the decision-making interaction process among TMT members are antecedents for strategic decision quality. Concomitantly, the consensus around strategic decisions is equally important for positively influence performance (Amason, 1996).

There are many different ways to structure a TMT, which has an influence on the degree of interdependence and cooperation on different levels of the firm (Hambrick et al., 2015), as well as how strategic decisions are made (Amason & Sapienza, 1997; Finkelstein et al., 2009). From a marketing perspective, recent evidence shows that the marketing function is increasingly becoming dispersed within firms. While Krush et al. (2015) found that marketing's influence is impacted by the form of marketing capability dispersion, work by Homburg et al. (2015) highlighted the loss of influence of the marketing department. Recognizing this intra-organizational distribution of the marketing capability, there is a need to leverage the composition of the firm TMTs for strategic decision-making to mitigate potential negative consequences and drive positive firm performance.

The composition of TMT reflects the organizational structure of the firm. Despite the increasing amount of functional managers, Guadalupe et al. (2014) state that there are still many general and divisional managers in TMTs. This type of composition, with managers who might have different goals and perspectives, directly affects the decision process. Further, Lee et al. (2015) have criticized traditional structures as being outdated and not customer-centric. Additionally, the size of the TMT allows for variation in the team, for example, a larger TMT may allow for the presence of multiple functional marketing roles in addition to the CMO (Menz, 2012). Strategic decision-making is an antecedent to firm performance, and upper echelon theory partially predicts firm performance by the background, values, and cognition that the individuals in the leadership team bring to the firm. Aligning with contingency theory, we expect that the composition of the TMT will affect strategic decision-making and the continual adaptation of the organization's approaches to ensure alignment and firm performance. Specifically, different perspectives facilitated via the organizational structure composition can either enable or hinder decision-making, depending on strategy alignment on the different levels, leading us to posit:

P1: The functional structure with regard to composition (as represented by the breadth of functional representation) of the TMT influences the ability to make strategic decisions.

The organizational structure maps out the long-term configuration of accountabilities, tasks, and activities (Skivington & Daft, 1991). Two dimensions, in particular, are first, the formal structure of roles and procedures, which includes hierarchy, resource allocation, and organizational norms; and second, the informal patterns of interaction and networking among members of the organization. The functional TMT member role (e.g., CEO, CFO, CMO) informs the demographics of the individual selected to play the role. Functional TMT role structure affects the relationships between the roles as well as the demographic composition of the TMT (Beckman & Burton, 2011).

The composition, or structure, of executive groups, varies greatly and there can be different degrees of interdependence and cooperation on different levels of a firm (Menz, 2012). Structural interdependence, as defined by Hambrick et al. (2015, p. 450) is 'the degree to which roles and administrative mechanisms are arranged such that members of an executive group affect each other.' Conceptually, structural interdependence is categorized into three facets, namely, horizontal (degree of task and responsibility interdependence), vertical (if members are hierarchical peers) and reward interdependence (payoffs for collective accomplishments).

Literature supports the notion that greater horizontal and vertical interdependence in the TMT is positively associated with TMT tenure heterogeneity and firm performance (Hambrick et al., 2015; Workman et al., 1998). Tenure heterogeneity, however, negatively impacts firm performance when there is low vertical and horizontal interdependence, suggesting that structure and TMT demography can be used to coerce unity and cohesion. Hence, TMT interdependence seems to be an important aspect affecting performance. Indeed, this is also supported by Colbert et al. (2014) who found evidence for TMT interdependence positively moderating team mechanisms (communication and cohesion) and organizational and team performance. We therefore propose:

P2_a: The degree of structural interdependence between functional marketing leadership position in the TMT will influence the comprehensiveness of strategic decisions.

Much of the previous research on functional TMT focused on group heterogeneity (Hambrick et al., 2015). A basic assumption in the literature is that the TMT group collectively affects and shapes the firm and that having a homogenous group can reduce risks for conflicts, yet often hinders innovation and creativity. Functional background heterogeneity or the 'representation in the top management team of various business functions such as marketing, operations, and finance' (Kor, 2006, p. 1084) may at times result in conflict, due to lack of alignment of goals between business departments (Kor, 2006). The organizational structure can have similar implications too. Understanding the structure and allocation of roles in an executive team is crucial, as it reflects the organizational structure and strategy (Guadalupe et al., 2014).

Goodman and Rousseau (2004) highlight in the organizational improvement paradox, that leadership orchestrates organizational changes to create performance benefits both for departments or units and for the complete firm. Similarly, Guadalupe et al. (2014) argue that functional managers operating on a corporate level may seek and exploit synergies, as they are working with a centralized, holistic view instead of looking at the business unit as a silo. These types of structures can limit cooperation and coordination, and as such, companies have looked into new forms of structures such as the matrix (combining functions and divisions), team (separate functions and processes into a group with a common goal) or network structures (specialized entities coordinated by contracts or norms), which can be seen as more customer-centric (Lee et al., 2015). With this in mind, the next proposition proposes the following:

P2_b: The degree of alignment between multiple functional marketing leadership positions in the TMT will influence the comprehensiveness of strategic decisions

3.2 Marketing organization and functional TMTs

Strategic marketing decisions include setting strategic direction related to value-propositions, competitors, offerings, target markets, and business models, as well as how to implement strategic decisions and assess the results (Grewal & Tansuhaj, 2001; Moorman & Day, 2016). Other strategic marketing capabilities include marketing planning and marketing implementation capabilities (Day, 1994; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005). Marketing strategy implementation is built on the effective development of marketing programs and appropriate use of marketing resources (e.g., Slotegraaf et al., 2003). Marketing strategy requires an effective understanding of opportunities and threats, as well as the ability for continuous learning and adaptation (Moorman & Day, 2016; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005).

Creation and execution of successful marketing strategy are pivotal for firm performance (Atuahene-Gima & Murray, 2004; Matsuno & Mentzer, 2000), with the inverse being that the overarching firm-level strategy process influences how marketing strategy process develops (Moorman & Day, 2016). Powerful marketing departments render greater respect in a firm's TMT and execute stronger influence over the firm's strategic decision-making (Feng et al., 2015). The type of chosen business strategy is a moderator of business performance (Matsuno & Mentzer, 2000), while market orientation has a positive effect on firm performance, for example, innovation, financial, and customer implications (Kirca et al., 2005; Moorman & Day, 2016). Having strategic flexibility supports firms in responding to change in competitive environments (Grewal & Tansuhaj, 2001).

Mattsson et al. (2006, p. 166) discuss how top management often creates 'grand or corporate strategies' that are so detached from the employees as well as customers, and employees should be included in the strategy formulation. They claim that employees often lack the opportunity to make changes, with focus instead on the interests of the managers and shareholders. At the same time, much of the marketing and service literature promotes the idea that employees are the connection between the company and its customers (Mattsson et al., 2006). This is of importance, as the inter-relationships between TMT composition and firm outcomes are complex and difficult to specify (Jackson, 1992). Not understanding and guiding how strategic decisions are formulated has negative impacts, such as lack of understanding and commitment to the decisions at different levels of the organization (Guth & MacMillan 1986; MacMillan, 1978). Further, marketing effectiveness has been found to be associated with marketing organization's strategic type fit (MacMillan, 1978). Based on the discussion above, there is a need for coordination at all levels, often left in the hands of (middle) managers, and, we suggest:

P3_a: Marketing organization more optimally *formulate* strategic decisions when the intent of its organizational structures is well defined, coordinated and represented by the member(s) of the functional TMT.

Planned marketing strategy is not sufficient, it requires effective implementation in order to make the connection of marketing efforts to subsequent firm performance (Vorhies & Morgan 2003). Leaders at different levels have significant impact influencing the implementation of a strategy, and top specifically managers play an essential role in making sure their subordinate leaders and teams are aligned to enable change (O'Reilly et al.,

2010). O'Reilly et al. (2010) found evidence in the medical sector that in times of strategic change managers at all levels must be aligned, as it affected employee perceptions regarding the change and support of the strategy, directly affecting patient satisfaction. Mattsson et al. (2006) call strategy implementation the 'acid test of leadership' (p. 172), and they state that even if strategies were to be formulated and implemented at the lower levels, top management plays a seminal role due to their power and legitimacy. They are also the connection between the owners and the employees, and they play a major role for communicating both within and outside the organization (Mattsson et al., 2006), and therefore we posit the following:

P3_b: Marketing organization more optimally *implement* strategic decisions when the intent of its organizational structures is well defined, coordinated and represented by the member(s) of the functional TMT.

Feng et al. (2015) suggest that the marketing department's power has increased over the period 1993–2008. The influence that the marketing department exerts on varying firm activities furthermore also positively affects the financial and customer relationship performance of the organization (Homburg et al., 2015, 2000). Factors such as strategic choices and performance levels partially predicted by managerial background characteristics influence strategic choice and the resulting outcomes (Beckman & Burton, 2011; Carpenter et al., 2004; Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The effect of business strategy on organizational performance is influenced by the firm's organizational structure (Swilley, 2015). Today, far from simply the existence of the CMO, there are many different types of executive marketing roles who may coexist in the TMT of a firm (Menz, 2012). Extant research has already identified that the presence of a CMO – or a CEO with marketing experience – in the TMT drives a more marketing-oriented organization (Brower & Nath, 2018). Related to the influence of marketing leadership on marketing organization we posit:

P4: The presence of a functional marketing leadership position in the TMT will positively influence the ability to define, coordinate and represent marketing organization in the firm.

Senior management factors are suggested antecedents to the market orientation of an organization (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). There is a positive effect of organizational structure concerning market orientation (Kirca et al., 2005) when interactions across departments are frequent, internal conflict is minimized, and the interaction of specialists across functional areas is promoted (Swilley, 2015). Boddy and Croft (2016) posit that TMT skills and knowledge is important in the development of market orientation. Lee et al. (2015) questioned the traditional organizational structures (functional and divisional), stating that they are not customer-centric. To compensate, multiple marketing leaders in the TMT could represent the voice of the customer and the market from multiple perspectives. The work of Webster, in particular, argues that it needs to address a broad field of strategic, tactical, and cultural aspects due to changes in how organizations are becoming more customer-centric in their marketing approach (Lusch & Webster, 2011; Webster, 2009; Webster et al., 2005). Reflecting on this multi-functional role, we propose:

P5: The presence of more than one functional marketing leadership position in the TMT will positively influence the degree of market orientation a firm displays.

4. Discussion

Our work proposes that the organizational structure with regard to composition, as represented by the breadth of functional representation on the TMT, influences the ability to make strategic decisions and impacts marketing organization. This is of significance as, contingent on the desired outcome (e.g., Fiedler, 1964), there are many different ways to structure a TMT and create interdependence. The TMT structure, as well as its members, becomes contingent on the outcomes they are driving to achieve – which bears a subsequent influence on the process of aligning, formulating, and implementing strategic decisions. In the creation of the TMT, consideration of how to best reflect the presence of functional marketing leadership in the TMT, as well as how and to what degree such representation will positively influence the marketing organization in the firm is relevant.

Morris and Pitt (1994) question if separating marketing from the strategy is wise, and Mattsson et al. (2006) argue that marketing should reclaim corporate strategy by representing the voice of the customer. And, as highlighted by Lusch and Webster (2011, p. 129) ‘it is critical for enterprises to realize and operate as if marketing is no longer simply a separate business function but also a general management responsibility within a broad network enterprise where the interests of many stakeholders need to be unified with the customer and the enterprise’. Additionally, not only relying on the singular presence of a CMO – but allowing for a broader field of functional marketing leadership positions in the TMT can be expected to positively influence the degree of market orientation a firm displays.

We posit that marketing organization would more optimally formulate and implement strategic decisions when its mission is well defined, the members are internally aligned, and the organization functions in an interdependent ecosystem. A well-coordinated and represented functional TMT is an important element, which requires careful organizational consideration – both in structure and design. Evidence already shows that powerful marketing departments positively influence firm performance and execute stronger influence over the firm’s strategic decision-making (Feng et al., 2015). By way of our propositions, we propose that the organizational structure would indeed influence strategic decision-making, and underline the relevance of paying attention to the degree of interdependence and cooperation in the firm.

5. Implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research

This work has multiple implications. First, these propositions synthesize and expand on extant research, looking at the interface between strategy, management, and marketing organization, in the context of the functional and central role that marketing plays in the performance of the firm. Further, it provides the opportunity for researchers to empirically test these propositions. Additionally, the reasoning related to the propositions provides opportunity from a business school curriculum perspective. This paper contributes a lens through which TMT composition and marketing organization choices – to drive

continuous adaptation and firm performance – can be assessed. Specifically, in creating a focus on what organizational structure, and what interplay of roles and alignment between multiple functional marketing leadership positions to promote from a management perspective. This aids in educating future firm leaders by instilling ability for continuous adaptation by the TMT in a way that supports performance optimization. Adaptation cannot be made in a vacuum, rather it must be proactively identified and supported by a firm's senior leaders. Furthering this ability and understanding may both aid strategic decision-making and serve to provide a much-needed increase in top management support for marketing (Homburg et al., 2015).

The conceptual propositions and findings suggest that the organizational structure can have an effect on marketing capability, and influence the agility of the organization, as the strategies are formulated closer to the market. This notion has implications for both academia and practice. From a managerial perspective, this work provides early insights into considerations for strategic decision-making and organizational design for the marketing organization.

There are also limitations to this work. Firstly, the focus is on the top management teams and marketing capability, the quality of the strategic decision-making process or stage of the decision-making process is not considered. Recognizing that strategic leadership shapes the marketing capability by setting direction, team leadership/management subsequently takes over the role to execute the marketing capability. Often, the functional TMT member wears multiple simultaneous 'hats' (Ancona and Nadler, 1989), one as a member of the top management team, another as a (formal) team leader in charge of implementing the change the TMT has strategized. Team cohesion is important to achieve at all levels of an organization, as teamwork often is perceived as key to achieving organizational goals and competitive advantage – making team leadership essential. While an important and interesting field, the impact of team leadership/management, and the process of marketing strategy alignment throughout the organization, fall outside the scope of this work. Secondly, this paper does not take into consideration the implications organizational governance, external situational, or personality factors, may have on firm processes and structure. Further delineation is made to focus on two of four dimensions Homburg et al. (2000) argue encompass a majority of decisions related to firm organization, namely structure and coordination, and the influence of culture and power is not considered in this work.

We hope that the insights and propositions of this paper encourage future research in how firms can be organized to ensure marketing excellence and successful strategy formulation and execution. Further research could develop and study organizational designs with a specific focus on marketing organization. This resonates with Lee et al. (2015), who stated that more research is needed on how organizational design can be used to solve marketing problems. Additionally, building on the work of Hambrick and Mason (1984), due consideration of the macro- and micro-environmental influences and its impact on management formation and structure, could be a future area for exploration. For example, exploring the influence of market volatility or internal organizational instability on the strategic decision-making of the functional TMT, and its accompanying impact on firm performance could be an area for future exploration.

We believe there is promise in combining marketing organization and leadership literature. In the recent literature, the concept of shared or collective leadership has gained interest, with the focus of seeing leadership as a function shared by the group members, and not merely one person (Lord et al., 2017). Future research could consider the effects of shared leadership on marketing organization, and how it can affect and potentially aid, marketing decision-making. Lastly, future research in the marketing area could look into the impact of types of leadership and management personalities on marketing organization: Contrast traditional leadership theories with transformational leadership, which is the most widely studied leadership forms in the past 20 years. There are many exciting strategic avenues for marketing, as wisely said: 'A strategic approach to marketing is the final – and very powerful – means of restoring its effectiveness' (Hulbert & Pitt, 1996, p. 47).

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