

The Influence of Top Management on Market Orientation in Malawi

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Abstract

The paper investigates the prevalence of market orientation in insurance industry in Malawi. It is a well-known fact that market orientation improves business performance because all the right actions relating to the market and consumers are well thought through. This being a behaviour construct requires the top leadership to be fully involved and walk the talk in leading the organization to drive the marketing agenda.

The study aimed to find out the status of the insurance companies on market orientation while at the same time checking the influence of top leadership in the implementation of the marketing concept, a prerequisite for market orientation.

MARKOR scale for assessing market orientation was used bearing in mind that some of its constructs review the cultural angle thereby revealing employee behaviour towards their drive to live and or implement the marketing concept. Survey was conducted in one insurance company under the case study research methodology using simple random sampling. Primary data collection was complemented with qualitative in-depth interviews at the same company. Analysis was done using SPSS tool version 20.

The findings reveal that insurance companies in Malawi are market oriented. In addition, top leadership has strong influence on market orientation. Some shortfalls were identified for companies to work on to correct these shortfalls in order to achieve high-level market orientation.

Keywords: *market orientation, insurance marketing, marketing concept, top leadership and market orientation, influence of top leadership, insurance sector in Malawi.*

Introduction

Insurance business in Malawi is one of the least developed sectors such that awareness of insurance products is very low. Current estimates for insurance penetration is 1.4% (RBM 2016) which is amongst the lowest in the region. The business operates in the service sector of the economy which in itself, is also lowly developed. Service sector has many other sub sectors, which have a big command to the country's GDP despite being lowly developed. This means if the sector was to be fully developed and achieved record growth, the country economic outlook could greatly improve.

Malawi is amongst the least developed country with GDP per capital of USD342.00 that is third lowest in the region (IMF 2018). This naturally presents a challenge to Malawians whose 50% of the population live below the poverty line according to June 2018 updated economic estimates (CIA 2018). The country is heavily reliant on agriculture with majority of its farming not mechanized. Peasant farming is the common mode of farming because the country is 85% rural populated (Bingu wa Muthalika 2006). There are very few commercial farming going on in the country. The risk to this is multi-faceted in that these peasant farmers have meagre resources, always lacking farm inputs thereby relying on government subsidies. They do not insure their crops yet liable to weather shocks and the same time lacks other farm inputs. Notwithstanding this, the main crop grown by these farmers is the main staple food crop, maize. Maize as a crop is vulnerable to weather patterns and always need fertilizer to perform well. In addition to this, maize can be attacked by pests and diseases which when this happens, farmers have no capacity to control such attacks. The country has for a long time in the past, operated a good network of agricultural advisory system to peasant farmers. Of late, this system has slackened such that any attack on field crops, farmers have been exposed ending up with no harvest.

Government intervention with Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) produced good value at its onset but over the years, inefficiencies have caught up with the system such that it is now viewed as

being more political than the intended empowerment purpose. Being an agricultural based economy one would think that even most of the insurance business would be patronizing this farming sector. Contrary to this, insurance is meagerly represented in the sector as not many farmers mitigate their crop failure with insurances. In any case, these local farmers would not afford the required premiums to insure their crop.

Insurance sector in Malawi is mainly operating its business in general insurance, life assurance and pension business. As for general insurance, being mandatory especially some insurance lines like motor vehicle insurance, there is good business because the regulations and laws enforce it. However, companies mostly patronize life assurance and pension provision with very few individuals participating. Malawi had only 246,000 against a potential 5 to 6 million people in formal employment individuals on private insurance as of 2016 (Time Group 2017). This confirms the low patronage for insurance products in Malawi. Could it be that people are not aware of the insurance products in that insurance companies have not done much with their marketing? It is against this background that this research would like to find out and how marketing efforts can be utilized to grow insurance business especially improving penetration in Malawi.

Embracing marketing is key for the growth of any company. CIM (2015) states that marketing helps in identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitable and is responsible for businesses to articulate their strategies properly and coordinate its implementation in a company. However, marketing department need to be well resourced if it has to implement such marketing activities. The company needs to ensure that it practices market orientation through a full implementation of the marketing concept. The marketing concept has been defined as a cornerstone for a market oriented company. This concept has three pillars central to its implementation. These are market audits, market research and marketing mix. These three tenets are crucial in a business. A business that does not carry out marketing audits would surely not know what customers are going through in using its products or services. More importantly, it also helps to uncover what competition is doing on the market. Customer reaction to the products and services on the market are determined through these marketing audits. All this helps in making sure corrective measures are taken for the products to continue to be relevant to its consumers.

The other key pillar for the marketing concept is research. Research is critical in any product development as well as innovation drive. Checking consumer trends, confirming the products or services development and testing new products and communication concepts are some of the key focus areas in research. This is done to get assurance that the product to be launched meet consumer needs. Launching a product without researching may lead to gross mistakes and failure of the product making the company lose a lot of money. Research and Development (R&D) has been a major focus in today's world of competition. Companies invest a lot in R&D and just to mention a few, Unilever invests a lot in R&D with over 6000 people working in R&D ranging from scientist, product development managers to professionals like hairdressers (www.unilever.com). Johnson and Johnson invested 11.5% in R&D in 2013 (Fortune Magazine 2014).

Marketing mix is the last pillar in the marketing concept and it deals with the actual mix of the product that will be sold. It ensures that everything to do with the product or service is tested and ready for the market following its traditional four Ps of product, price, place and promotion. Today, these Ps have grown to seven or so just to make sure all angles of marketing mix preparation for the consumer are tested and reviewed before launching the product.

Problem statement

Many studies have taken place in many countries relating to market orientation. This construct is behaviour related and it is important that each country conduct such studies and in different sectors of the economy. Malawi has never done such a study in the insurance sector of the economy, although it is a well-known fact that market orientation has proved to enhance business performance. This study was carried out in the insurance industry of the service sector to bridge this gap and inform the status of market orientation in the insurance industry. Coupled with this, there is also little knowledge about the influence of top leadership on market orientation. This study apart from looking at the status of

market orientation in insurance sector of the service industry in Malawi, the leadership role in enforcing market orientation was also explored.

The insurance sector was chosen because of its low penetration in Malawi currently at 1.4%, which is lowest in the region. Through this study, some gaps could be identified that could help improve the penetration and grow the insurance industry in Malawi.

Objectives of the study

Looking at the landscape of insurance business in Malawi and its low penetration, it was important to find out why there is such a low penetration and if marketing is fully driving the insurance business in Malawi. As such, the following objectives were formed to direct the study

1. Is market orientation behaviour prevalent in Insurance companies?
2. Does top management have influence on market orientation?

Service industry in malawi

Service industry is a critical sector in Malawi just as it is across the globe. This sector brings notable economic contribution even beyond the manufacturing sector in a general industry set up. Combined contribution of the industry in Malawi is well over 60% (Hall and Mambo 2015). Of the total industry and service contribution to Malawi's gross domestic product (GDP) which stands at 67%. Service sector alone in Malawi takes a sizeable chunk of well over 70% contribution to value-added GDP (<http://www.intracen.org>). This makes the service sector very critical to Malawi and its growth would therefore bring positive impact on the economy. United Nations (2015) reports that in Africa, service industry contributes over 50% of the GDP.

Bingu wa Muthalika (2006) reports that Malawi's leading economic activity is agriculture which employs at least 80% of the workforce as most people reside in rural areas and engage in farming. Beyond being the mainstream of the economic activities, Agriculture drives national and household food security in Malawi as most people live in rural areas. Very little is being done on insurance for agriculture sector of the economy that is even more vulnerable. With the low penetration of insurance, it can be concluded that the people in the rural areas are not covered especially on crop failure.

Agricultural activities in Malawi are mostly dependent on rainfall due to lower numbers of the commercial farmers who can afford mechanization. This means any shock in the rainfall pattern, has direct impact on the peasant farmers as they solely depend on rainfall for their agriculture. These farmers do not take any insurance for crop failure something, which commercial farmers could afford. Being peasant farmer, affordability for insurance products is always a challenge. Thus, very few can afford insurance unless taken by their other relations who are better off or working somewhere and able to assist.

Malawi can achieve growth in insurance and penetration if the entire economic spectrum is tackled especially the agricultural based economic activities. Marketing of insurance products is vital to drive its awareness and uptake. Tien and Yang (2014) observed that cross marketing is a factor that need to be taken into account in insurance growth. Growth and profitability coupled with expense ratio are key in insurance business for customers to have confidence in the insurance firm. Regardless of the size of the insurance firm, all can grow in an economy as long as they drive customer value proposition for their services and products. Tien and Yang (2014) found out that smaller life insurance attain greater growth than older ones because smaller insurance firms may enjoy higher asset growth rates in their early years of establishment.

However, with the size of the company, some may relax in their drive especially marketing activities. Murrey, Tudor and Hollman (1991) confirmed this position in their study that larger insurance firms tend not to drive the full marketing concept in their operation. Malawi has both small sized and large insurance companies and the case insurance entity used for this study is in the category of small sized insurance firm with majority of foreign ownership and has been aggressive in driving its products on the market from observation point of view. This company is ranked third on the Malawi market.

Malawi being an agriculture oriented country and much more dependent on peasant farming; there is need to harness the insurance activities with farming and ensure farmers are covered against crop failure. Hess and Syroka (2005) contend that weather shocks in an agriculture-based economy need

some insurance to mitigate weather related risks. This would not only help the farmer to hedge against the risks but in the long run, the farmer would not have all their efforts wiped away in cases of adverse weather conditions. Reinsurance may be one vehicle to manage the risks associated with weather dependent ventures (Hess and Syroka 2005). This only suggests that insurance firms need to look into how best they can package their products in order to make inroads into the farming arena. This, they could do by utilizing the pension funds or involve banks for loans with affordable interest rates. Subsidies that have been in use in the country for a while have helped mitigate production by peasant farmers but have not taken these farmers out of the vicious circle. The resultant of farm input subsidies is that it is a vicious cycle in itself such that instead of resolving and equipping farmers for the next farming season, farmers have relied on the next FISP year on year, a thing that donor communities have queried. In 1990 when FISP was removed, maize production went down meaning farmers could not sustain production without FISP and this led to its re-introduction in 1998 (Chibwana et al 2010).

Most Malawians as individuals do not take insurance products and those who are insured have mostly been by default of their company doing it as a legal requirement. The low 1.4% insurance penetration leaves most of the population without insurance. In some cases, one may conclude that this could be due to lack of income to spare for insurance or lack of knowledge about insurance product. Elsewhere, studies have found out that failure of people to adopt insurance products has partly been due to demographic factors of age, education, marital status and household income (Yusuf, Gbadamosi and Hamadu 2009).

Market orientation in Insurance companies

Market orientation as a behavioural construct that look at how employees behave in the discharge of their duties towards the market. Being a behavioural construct, it taps on people's feelings and beliefs. Each culture may display different ways of achieving market orientation. Schalk and Gudlaugsson (2008) looks at market orientation as a form or organizational culture where employees are committed to continuously create superior customer value, or as a sequence of marketing activities that lead to better performance.

Market orientation has been assessed using scales developed by theorist Narver and Slater (1990) for MKTOR scale and Kohli, Jaworski and Kumar (1993) for MARKOR scale. Although there are other theorist that have developed different assessments of market orientation, these two scales have been used in many studies, which have validated them to produce meaningful results. Using MKTOR scale, Saini and Makolobate (2011) concluded that South African life insurance companies had market orientation prevalent in their organization contrary to what everyone thought. They also confirmed that MKTOR could be used as a diagnostic tool and or training for the employees on market orientation drive. However, of the two scales, MARKOR constructs dives more into cultural issues in its assessment. Gauzente (1999) in the study on content analysis of MKTOR and MARKOR revealed that MARKOR scale attaches more value on cultural content in its assessment than MKTOR scale. Theorists Kohli & Jaworski (1990, 1993) and Kohli, Jaworski & Kumar (1993) considered market orientation as looking into organizations wide intelligence generation for current and future needs of customers. Not only that, these theorists viewed dissemination of gathered intelligence and its responsiveness to the market and coordination within departments as critical in MARKOR scale. Gauzente (1999) further says the two scales differ on cultural consideration and recommends MARKOR if cultural behaviour assessment is intended.

Top leadership and market orientation

Anything that involve employees need to relate to the leadership of the company as well. Since market orientation is the implementation of the marketing concept, leadership is critical in driving such implementation. Not only that, leaders dictate a particular tempo in the business that would create a conducive environment for market orientation to flourish. As confirmed by many scholars, market orientation helps business achieve their growth and profit objectives. Leadership of the company is crucial in the implementation of the marketing concept and later alone ensuring that employee behaviour is right for the market orientation. Leaders in any business must lead by example. What

leaders do is what employees will follow. Walking the talk by leaders is very important and has a bearing on trust levels in any business.

While market orientation is meant to be championed by marketing department, the CEO in the company must set the pace. The CEO need to participate in all marketing activities. Only when employees see the leadership participating in activities, they feel the seriousness of the activity. Apart from directing the business with a clear vision for the future, leaders in a company must set the tone and culture that should prevail in the business. Many marketing activities require participation of top leadership because marketing drives the business and represents the customer and consumer within the business as their voice.

Insurance in malawi

All businesses operation in a competitive environment. Malawi with the merge insurance penetration means even tighter competition. More marketing is happening on the market as observed by the author aimed at wooing customers to the insurance products in Malawi. Many insurance companies have adopted a door-to-door strategy to sell the insurance products to customers. Despite this effort, still more very few people in Malawi own insurance policies. RBM (2016) confirms this notion in that only 1.4% of the population have an insurance policy. Yusuf, Gbadamosi and Hamadu (2009) suggests that pushing people to buy insurance products is not the best way but being a market oriented insurer would pay more dividend as potential insurance customers would see more benefits. Most often, education in financial services and insurance products could help in aiding the uptake of the insurance products. Gaurav, Cole and Tabacman (2011) confirmed the fact that people who are educated in financial literacy and insurance are more likely to adopt insurance services especially those earmarked for peasant farmers.

Researchers according to literature (Langat et al 2015, Kaur and Gupta 2012 & Missaoui and Ali Saidi 2015) concludes that market orientation enhances performance of businesses. Therefore, companies need to strive to ensure that their businesses are market oriented. However, according to Kotler (2006), this is only possible if the marketing concept is fully implemented in the organization.

Research methodology

Market orientation is a behavioural construct and one needs to study the real behaviour of the organization. The research methodology adopted aimed at ensuring that such behaviour understanding is observed.

With this in mind, case study research methodology of data collection was applied in this study. There is need to understand the dynamics of the organization in reference to the marketing concept, which has been considered as the cornerstone of market orientation. Grey (2014) recommends case study methodology in such efforts to study and observe behaviour in an organization, which was the main motive of the study. In this case study methodology, both quantitative and qualitative data collection methodology were used in order to supplement each other. Other researcher recommend such mixed research methodology (Creswell and Clark, 2007 and Toomela 2008).

Greenfield (2002) defines research as an art aided by skill of enquiry, experimental design, data collection, measurement and analysis by interpretation and by presentation. There is need for guiding research question to guide the research process. Walter (2010) describes research question as the heart of research design and backs the importance of research question. For case study research, descriptive research is applied hence in this study; this was complemented by quantitative, predictive research through survey questionnaire.

Research design

Grey (2014) takes research design as an overarching plan for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. This, according to Grey (2014) describes the purpose of the study and kind of questions being addressed, the technics used for collecting data, approaches to sampling and analysis that will ensue. Other researchers have referred to the research design as a blue print of research activities (Shukla 2008).

Primary data collection used both fieldwork by survey through structured questionnaire and discussion guide that was open-ended administered through in-depth interview.

Structured questionnaire and discussion guide

This study used both structured and unstructured questionnaire to collect data. The structured questionnaire was an adaptation from MAKTOR scale developed by Kohli, Jaworski & Kumar (1993). This scale was adopted because of its concerns on cultural attributes in its assessment (Gauzente 1999). The study used MARKOR scale and not MKTOR because some researchers concluded that MKTOR does not look at cultural attributes (Gauzente 1999)

Primary data collection was also collected through in-depth interviews conducted by the researcher using the knowledge and skills gained being a marketing professional. The discussion guide being open-ended aimed at confirming and probing more on behaviour areas that were found in the quantitative survey feedback. This further allowed the researcher to look for evidence of the behaviours as provided for in the survey instrument.

Sampling design and technique

Using simple random sampling, a sample was selected from the population of the chosen entity in this case study research methodology. Because it is not feasible to include everyone in the study, sampling was necessary. Employees in management and supervisory positions were targeted as sampling frame. A simple random sampling was applied from the available populations. The sampling frame that consisted managers and supervisors were considered knowledgeable in matters of market orientation. Grey (2014) defines a sample as a set of individuals selected from a parent population for a research study. Though this is a case study methodology, still more it interviewed a number of employees of the selected insurance entity.

The actual population in the selected insurance company was 100 of which those in the sampling frame, thus managers and supervisors were 31 in total. Questionnaires were sent to 25 employees randomly selected and 19 of them responded to the questionnaire.

Data collection

For survey data collection, a 6-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to which respondents scored the option that best suited their feelings about market orientation constructs.

Carefully constructed questionnaire is the principle tool used to collect data where surveys are concerned (Gray 2014). Respondents answered the questionnaire through google application online (<http://www.google.com>). These questionnaires were therefore self-administered through online google generated application.

The Human Resource and Administration Manager coordinated the research within the organization. The researcher generated the link with all questions into the google survey application and sent to the coordination. The coordinator internally sent the link via email to all intended participants. Participants opened the link and responded to the questions. All responses were collated on the same google application system. This questionnaire administration was easy and kept updating in the system as participants finished the questions and submit. Researcher was able to follow the response rate as each response popped up in the researcher's email alerting about the new response.

On the other hand, discussion guide, an open-ended questionnaire was conducted with the head of marketing. This mainly focused on evidence from responses given but also to confirm some of the documentation that were being generated while implementing the marketing concept as a prerequisite for market orientation.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS version 20 (IBM 2011). Data was coded as required and variable were entered into an excel sheet before being transferred to the SPSS package to produce frequencies, means and standard deviation. The same statistical package was used to produce relationship between top management and different constructs in the MARKOR scale to check the influence of top leadership on market orientation.

In-depth interview data that was collected through discussion guide was used to ascertain behaviours as well as evidence of some market orientation parameters. The qualitative interview was therefore used as a checker of the company's position on market orientation, as a sequential explanatory study where quantitative data is crosschecked using qualitative interviews (Creswell and Clark 2011).

Findings of the study

This section provides the findings of the study starting with the characteristics of the respondents in the company that was selected as a case study entity. Of the 25 intended participants that were selected using simple random sampling, only 19 responded to the questionnaire that represented a 76% response rate.

Table 1. Respondents' matrix

COMPANY	POPULATION	SAMPLING FRAME	RANDOM SAMPLE	USED RESPONSES	RESPONSE RATE
INSURANCE	100	31	25	19	76.0%

Source: Survey data

The response rate was good bearing in mind that this was a self-administered questionnaire. Other similar research studies elsewhere have achieved lower response rate. This is a good response rate mainly because the coordinator who emailed the link to participants was an internal and high-ranking manager in the organization. The decision to use an internal coordinator was appropriate and enhanced the response rate.

Table 2. Composition of respondents by department

	INSURANCE	
DEPARTMENTS INTERVIEWED	Frequency	Percent
1. Marketing (Group and Individual Life)	10	52.6
2. Life Administration (Group and Individual Life)	6	31.6
3. Finance and HR Administration	1	5.3
4. Information Technology (IT)	1	5.3
5. Corporate and General Management	1	5.3
Total	19	100

Source: Survey data

From the outcome of the survey, all departments were represented as depicted in the table above. Both Marketing and Life administration combined had 84% representation being the largest departments in the organization. Having all department representation meant data gathered represented the views of the entire organization and therefore reliable data.

Table 3. Experience in the Industry and Company

INSURANCE COMPANY		Service in the Industry				Service in the Company				Work Station		
		Less than 1 Year	More than 1 year Less than 5 Years	More than 5 years Less than 10 Years	More than 10 Years	Less than 1 Year	More than 1 year less than 5 Years	More than 5 years Less than 10 Years	More than 10 Years	Urban	Rural	
Sample size												
25	19	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	33.3%	27.8%	16.7%	22.2%	100%	0%		

Source: Survey data

The survey indicate a good experience level for the respondents with over 50% with over 5 years' experience in the insurance industry while in the company about 40% of these respondents have been working in the company for over 5 years. This was critical for the understanding of the business and therefore better articulation of the questionnaire constructs.

Table 4. Education level of respondents

Company	Population	Sample	Responses	Response Rate	Male	Female	MSCE / O Level	Under Graduate	Graduate	Post Graduate
Insurance	36	25	19	76%	61.1%	38.9%	5.6%	66.7%	16.6%	11.1%

Source: Survey data

The respondents' education revealed that 94.4% had sound education from undergraduate (Diploma, technician) level to post graduate. This meant that they could easily comprehend the constructs and respond appropriately to the survey questionnaire on their own self-administration. It was interesting to note the gender balanced at 60:40 between male and female. A good representation of gender although not balanced at 50:50 being called for by gender activists. These respondents being in the managerial and supervisory role presents another added advantage to the understanding and comprehension of the study constructs.

These being employees in such position, the researcher felt that they needed to take a position on the choice of their responses hence the use of a 6-point Likert scale questionnaire that did not provide for middle ground. Other researchers have argued against such non middle ground Likert scale but for this study, it was felt that an option needed to be reached by each respondent having worked in the organization and or industry for over 5 years.

Results and discussion

The study set forth to check if the insurance companies in Malawi are market oriented as the first objective. The second objective was to check if top management have any influence in driving market orientation.

Market orientation outcome

Through the frequencies, mean and standard deviation calculated from the data obtained, below are the outcome of each of the four constructs in the MARKOR assessment scale.

Table 5. Intelligence gathering

	INSURANCE	
INTELLIGENCE GENERATION (IG)	MEAN	SD
IG1. In this business, we meet with customers at least once a year to find out what products or services they will need in the future	4.00	1.732
IG2. I myself interact directly with customers to learn how to serve them better	4.58	1.427
IG3. In this business, we do a lot of in-house market research	4.05	1.224
IG4. We are slow to detect changes in our customer product preferences	4.00	1.491
IG5. We conduct survey (polling) of our customers at least once a year to assess the quality of our service to them	2.83	1.425
IG6. We often talk with or conduct a survey of those who can influence our customers	3.53	1.124
IG7. We collect Industry information through informal means (e.g. meetings, lunch with industry friends, talk with trade partners, regulator, etc.)	4.32	0.885
IG8. In our business, Intelligence for our competitors is generated independently by different departments	4.32	0.885
IG9. We are slow to detect fundamental shifts in our Industry (e.g. competition, technology, regulation)	4.00	1.491
IG10. We regularly review the likely effect of changes in our business environment like regulation on our customers	3.89	1.15
GRAND MEAN	3.95	1.28

Source: Survey data

Intelligence generation provide access to both current and future needs of the customer and through this construct, customer are able to provide their experience currently and what they could be looking for in the future. However, assessment of company products and service scored below average at 2.83

(SD = 1.425). This requires a lot of attention because without knowing how the company is doing is catastrophic as customers may abandon the product eventually. This parameter gives room for customers to compare with the quality they receive from other products. Their response therefore, presents the future of the product and ignoring it may lead to sales decline.

When quality of the existing products is always checked, it gives ample time to the company to relook at their offering and if it needs improvement, that should be done immediately to avoid loss of customers. Despite this shortfall, all other parameters scored above 3.00 suggesting that the company does generate intelligence information.

Table 6. Intelligence dissemination

INTELLIGENCE DESSEMINATION (ID)	INSURANCE	
	MEAN	SD
ID1. A lot of informal talk in this business concerns our competitors tactics or strategies	4.21	0.918
ID2. We have interdepartmental meetings at least once a quarter to discuss market trends and developments	4.21	1.548
ID3. Marketing personnel in our business spend time discussing customers future needs with other functional departments	3.95	1.311
ID4. When something happens to a major customer in the market, the whole business knows about it within a short period	4.74	1.195
ID5. Data on customer satisfactions are disseminated to all levels of the business on a regular basis	3.32	1.455
ID6. There is minimal communication between Marketing and other departments (Reverse question)	3.05	1.508
ID7. When one department finds out something about a competitor, it is slow to alert other departments (Reverse question)	3.47	1.389
GRAND MEAN	3.85	1.33

The results on intelligence dissemination reveal that the company disseminates the information generated from the market. All mean scores are above the average mean score of 3.00. This suggest prevalence of the culture of dissemination for the intelligence gathered. The only worry was the level of communication between marketing and other departments, which scored 3.05 right on the average score edge. The company can do better to move away from average score level. Overall score is 3.85, which confirms information dissemination within the business. This was also confirmed through in-depth discussions with the marketing manager that designated meetings are conducted monthly mainly focusing on sharing of market information. Such forums are crucial in sharing of information and must be encouraged at all cost.

Table 7. Responsiveness

RESPONSIVENESS ('R)	INSURANCE	
	MEAN	SD
R1. It takes us forever to decide how to react to our competitor price change (Reverse question)	2.95	1.682
R2. Principles of market segmentation drive new product development efforts in this business	4.79	0.787
R3. For one reason or another, we tend to ignore changes in our customer's product or service needs(Reverse question)	3.53	1.429
R4. We periodically review our product development efforts to ensure that they are in line with what customers want	4.21	1.134

R5. Our business plans are driven more by technological changes than market research (Reverse question)	3.74	1.195
R6. Several departments get together to plan a response to changes taking place in our business environment	3.84	1.5
R7. The products we sell depend more on internal politics than real market needs (Reverse question)	3.05	1.682
R8. If a major competitor were to launch a major campaign targeted at our customers, we would implement a response immediately	3.68	1.416
R9. The activities of different departments in this business are well coordinated	3.84	1.302
R10. Customer complaints fall on deaf ears in this business (Reverse question)	2.84	1.5
R11. We are quick to respond to significant changes in our competitors pricing structure	3.83	1.383
R12. When we find out that customers are not happy with our service, we take corrective action immediately	4.05	1.433
R13. When we find out that customers would like us to modify a product or service, the department involved makes concerted effort to modify the product/service	4.00	1.374
GRAND MEAN	3.72	1.37

Responsiveness also achieved a grand mean score of 3.72 well above the average score suggesting that the company responds to the demands of the market. Whatever comes through from the market is responded to accordingly. Responsiveness is vital otherwise; all the efforts taken on generating intelligence information and dissemination would be wasted if the company was not responding to the market demands. All the same, two parameters scored below average and these need pushing to ensure this entire construct provide the necessary feedback as desired. Customer complaint seem to take longer to resolve as the score was 2.85 (SD = 1.5). Another low score was time taken to respond to competitor price change having achieved 2.95 (SD = 1.682). Both of these two parameters are critical to this construct and must be reviewed and acted on. In-depth interviews revealed that although dissemination meetings take place, the actual documentation and follow up is rather slow, thus affecting the responsiveness of the company. Management need to enforce the culture of documenting all agree actions and follow up in the next meeting to ensure those tasked to take actions have done so.

Table 8. Inter-functional coordination

	INSURANCE	
INTERFUCNTIONAL COORDINATION (IC)	MEAN	SD
IC1. Every worker knows his/her competencies	4.21	0.976
IC2. Every worker knows his/her responsibilities	4.32	1.157
IC3. Every worker is aware of the main objectives of the business and knows how to contribute	4.26	0.991
IC4. We get employees comments, analyze them and give feedback	3.79	1.228
IC5. We regularly hold meetings with all employees where we discuss business challenges and success. Inform of new opportunities, threats and set new tasks	3.68	1.376
IC6. We take a positive approach to innovation	4.05	1.224
IC7. We prefer team working and mutual cooperation between departments	4.53	1.172
IC8. Managers in various sections do not express their opinion to the created plan	2.95	1.471

IC9. This business enforces team working such that we have cross functions teams within the business on various project	4.42	0.902
GRAND MEAN	4.02	1.17

Results reveal a high level of the market orientation for this construct with a grand mean score of 4.02. Out of all the parameters, only one scored below the mean. Expression of opinion by managers to the created plan scored 2.95 (SD = 1.471). Managers need to own the process and their opinion is crucial in understanding the entire business plan. It would appear the business plan is forced on them instead of involving them or doing bottom up approach. The company is encouraged to involve everyone in the creation of the business plan. When the plan is adopted, it must be cascaded to all employees for their buy in for implementation to be smooth. Apart from this, all other eight parameters scored above average

Table 9. Top management influence

	INSURANCE	
TOP MANAGEMENT INVOLVEMENT (TO)	MEAN	SD
TO1. Our top management briefs the organization about its goals and direction	4.79	0.787
TO2. Our top managers in every function take time to visit our customers both current and prospective	3.89	1.243
TO3. Our top management takes in the views of other staff where possible when suggestions are made	4.00	1.106
TO4. Our top management take risks especially on new ideas or innovations	4.16	1.425
GRAND MEAN	4.21	1.14

Source: Survey data

Top management is crucial in the implementation of the marketing concept thereby achieving the market orientation. The results reveal a full involvement of the top management team in making the environment conducive to the thriving of market orientation. An overall mean score of 4.21 testifies to their involvement in the drive for market orientation.

Table 10. MARKOR overall mean score

MARKOR SCALE	Grand Mean
	Insurance
Intelligence Gathering	3.95
Intelligence Dissemination	3.85
Responsiveness	3.72
Inter-functional Coordination	4.02
OVERALL GRAND MEAN	3.89

Source: Survey data

The table provide evidence that the insurance company used in this study case is market oriented as all its construct scored above average level of 3.00. The visual presentation in graph 1 below makes it clear that all the costructs scored above the average level of market orientation.

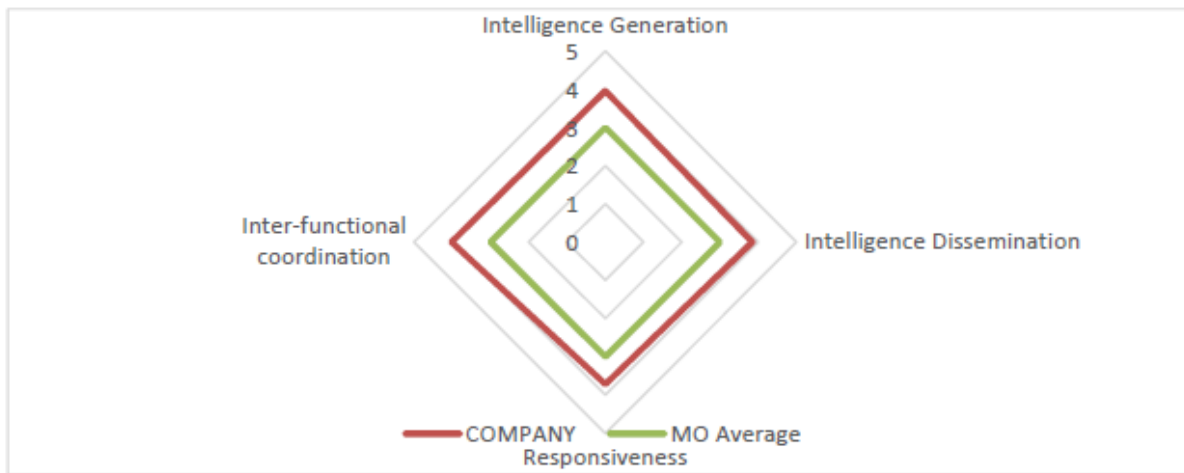


Figure 1. Overall MARKOR outcome

Source: Survey data

Overall outcome for MARKOR assessment confirmed that the Insurance company studies is market oriented with all the four construct scoring mean above average level of 3.00. Overall grand mean for the entire four construct achieved 3.89 well above average meaning that the company does exhibit the market orientation behaviour. Although responsiveness was lowest amongst the construct, it still scored above the average mean score.

Top management influence

The t-test was used to test the influence of top management on each of the four constructs regarding the market orientation behaviour. The results of which are displayed below

Top management against intelligence generation

Table 11. Top management influence on market orientation

Construct	Mean	Variance	Observations	Df	t Stat	P (T<=t)		t	
						one-tail	two-tail	one-tail	two-tail
Top Leadership	4.21	0.162	4						
Intelligence Generation	3.95	0.236	10	7	1.020	0.171	0.342	1.895	2.365
Intelligence dissemination	3.85	0.354	7	9	1.193	0.132	0.263	1.833	2.262
Responsiveness	3.72	0.289	13	7	1.960	0.045	0.091	1.895	2.365
Interfunctional coordination	4.49	0.006	4	3	-1.353	0.135	0.269	2.353	3.182

Df = degree of freedom, Hypothesized mean = 0

Source: survey data

- H0 Top Management has no influence on market orientation
- H1: Top Management has an influence on market orientation

From the above data, all P values were significant with 0.34, 0.26, 0.091 and 0.27 for Intelligence generation, Intelligence dissemination, Responsiveness and Inter-functional coordination respectively thus rejecting the null hypothesis that Top leadership has no influence on market orientation. Therefore, we accept the alternative hypothesis that top management showed significant influence on each of the constructs of MARKOR scale.

It can be concluded that Top leadership has strong influence on market orientation in MARKOR assessment instrument. All P values are significant at 95% level of confidence.

Overall, Top management according to the results above seem to have impactful influence on the way employees behave and discharge their duties that has been able to make the company market oriented. This suggests that leadership influence has a role on market orientation.

In conclusion, Top leadership revealed significant influence on the market orientation drive in a business. Naturally, if a company exhibits such behaviour, it should follow that the leadership takes keen interest to encourage the company to do so. Not only does the leadership encourage such behaviour but that they also must walk the talk for employees to follow effectively.

Conclusion

From the results discussed above, it has revealed that the insurance company practices market orientation with MARKOR scale scoring with grand mean 3.89. While this is so, there are still a few parameters that need to be reviewed and action taken to move the orientation to high level. Out of the Likert scale of 1 to 6, there is more room for improvement on the score to get the market orientation level much better not just above average.

Top leadership influence on market orientation came out positive in that each of the four constructs were impacted positively by top management. Market orientation being a behaviour construct, relies a lot on the behavior and therefore the environment prevailing in the company. It has come out clear that top leadership are fully involved in driving market orientation behaviour as they take part in most of these parameters. Walking the talk leaders should always do to ensure the followers follow.

Recommendation

Using MARKOR scale assessment, the company revealed market orientation above average. To achieve higher-level orientation which every business desires, would mean making good some of the parameters that dropped down the scores. There is need to improve in such parameters which scored below average. Furthermore, those parameters that scored within average need to be enhanced to get to high-level scores of above 4.00 mean score. The company needs to look at all these and come up with an action plan on how to improve such scores.

Top leadership involvement showed positive result. However, it rests on the same leaders to ensure the company moves to high-level market orientation through more involvement and enforcing actions where the company fell short.

Study limitations

In the process of gathering information for this study, a number of limitations need to be borne in mind for future research and or usage of the results. Primarily, the research adopted a case study methodology where only one entity was involved in the study, thus an insurance company. More companies could have been used but due to budgetary limitations, that was not possible. However, literature recommends case study methodology but using more entities would add more value

Sample size was low as only 25 respondents were targeted out of which 19 responded to the survey questionnaire. More sample could be used in larger insurance firms. This was another genuine limitation. Solace was there though that in-depth interview complemented the data collection. For case study methodology, the researcher needed to observe some behaviours and review some of the documentation. This makes the finding somewhat valid and reliable because observation through qualitative data collection was also applied.

Geographical spread yet present another limitation. The researcher used an insurance company that was based on Blantyre where the researcher is based too. Such decision was made for ease of contacts.

Use of a 6-point Likert scale could have been another limitation, as it did not provide middle ground for respondents who may not have a position to make.

Lastly, the survey was self-administered and that meant respondents used own interpretation with no reference for further understanding where in doubt.

However, despite the above listed limitations, the results add to the body of knowledge that insurance companies in Malawi are market oriented and that both top leadership and HR policies have positive impact in influencing market orientation

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