

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARKETING BACKGROUND EXPERTISE AND INTERNAL MARKET ORIENTATION?

*Theophilus Francis Gyepi-Garbrah**,
*Emmanuel Selase Asamoah***

Abstract

Background. Internal Market Orientation is a philosophy that is meant to create a seamless relationship among different functional areas in the organisation, with a view to achieving an improved organisations' performance. However, there is an on-going debate grounded on the upper echelon theory, with regard to how leaders' background characteristic influence firm performance; though with limited empirical support.

Research aims. This paper seeks to assess the relationship between marketing background expertise of senior executives and Internal Market Orientation, within the context of the public sector.

Methodology. Survey data was collected from senior executives of the public sector of Ghana, comprising 111 organisations; using a structured questionnaire. The hypothesized relationships between Marketing background expertise and the primary dimensions of Internal Market Orientation were tested through Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis.

Key findings. Data analyses reveal lack of support for the hypothesized relationships between marketing background expertise and the primary dimensions of Internal Market Orientation. However, the study provides empirical support for the on-going discourse on leadership characteristics and firm performance, in the context of the public sector; where research on Internal Marketing is limited. It also refines these discussions from both a non-western and a developing economy context.

Keywords: Internal Market Orientation, upper echelon, Marketing background, senior executives, public sector.

* Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

** University of Professional Studies, Accra.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Internal Marketing (IM) is a managerial concept which highlights the idea that employees are internal customers, who interact with employers, regarded as internal suppliers with the aim of achieving increased organisational performance (Berry, 1981; George, 1990; Grönroos, 1981). This idea of internal market exchange is underpinned by the understanding that the internal relationship between the employee and the employer is not different from the nature of exchanges that exists between organisations and their external customers. This view is somewhat interwoven with the notion that “employees are internal customers”, and their satisfaction as crucial to external customer satisfaction and organisational performance.

Various studies attest to the influence of senior management, or the upper echelon of an organisation on performance (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Hambrick, 2007). Hambrick (2007) argues that managers’ characteristics influence decisions regarding the strategic direction of the organisation. Instances where barriers to integrate marketing were identified, lack of experience and managerial ability were integral (Harrower, 2011). The role of senior management with regard to strategy implementation is extremely valued in a market-oriented organisation; and top managers’ responsibilities remain very integral (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). Management within the public sector has gained reasonable attention due to government pressure on government institutions to be self-financing. This direction became much evident under the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm (Verschuere & Beddeleem, 2013; De Vries & Nemec, 2013), where public sector organisation (PSOs) were required to adopt managerial principles similar to those of the private sector. Given the unimpressive outcomes attributed to the NPM (Dunleavy *et al.*, 2006), there have been calls for further studies with a focus on key stakeholders, with a view to achieving improved performance of the public service (Gnan *et al.*, 2013).

To a large extent, various authors concur that Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) influence a firm’s performance in a specific way due to varied talents and skills they may possess; though there is disagreements among various theorists and scholars; with limited empirical evidence to support those lines of argument (Gabaix & Landier,

2008; Bennesen, Kongsted, & Nielsen, 2008). Hence, the question of which background characteristics is appropriate becomes relevant, especially when businesses are having challenges with meeting their mandates (Ayaba, 2013). In an earlier study, Norburn and Birley (1988) found a positive correlation between a firm's performance and "output" functional experience, which supported previous arguments by Hambrick and Mason (1984). Further, Norburn and Birley (1988) investigated a dimension of the upper echelon theory, using top management teams, who possess a great deal of output functional experience. The findings supported a strong argument that favoured CEOs with multiple firm employment experience, as against those without the requisite experience. Further, Stone and Tudor (2005) affirmed Hambrick and Mason's (1984) position, arguing that CEO's functional background strongly influenced the culture, norms, and vision of the firm, to the extent that those with output background were more inclined towards customer relationship, market scanning, growth, creativity, and adaptability. Contrary, Nath and Mahajan (2008) observed that there has been a persistent decline in marketers' influence on corporate strategy over the years. However, Auh and Menguc (2009) maintained that managers who exhibited output-oriented virtues, including marketing managers, cultivated a dynamic culture that supported entrepreneurial activities. Further, Verhoef and Leeflang (2009) contend that most of these debates are anecdotal and journalistic, which require further empirical investigation. There were also suggestions that these arguments were inconclusive, with inconsistent results, coupled with short-comings in their scope and methodology (Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009; Li, Guohui, & Eppler, 2008).

Also, Ayaba (2013) noted that there was little evidence to support types of managerial/behavioural characteristics, educational background, or CEO attributes that are essential to firm performance. Despite these misgivings, there is harmony regarding CEOs influence on firm performance in specific ways, arising from managers' combination of talents and skills (Gabaix & Landier, 2008; Bennesen, Kongsted, & Nielsen, 2008). As regards the implementation of IM within organisations, Tag-Eldein and El-Said (2011) affirmed the importance of resource allocation to IM implementation, and indicated managers' responsibility towards that. In the view of Tag-Eldein and El-Said (2011), the amount of resources deployed for IM activities,

would determine the extent of the organisation's success. This phenomenon is explained within the context of normative rationality for resource allocation and deployment, as espoused by the social context of institutional theory (Oliver, 1997). The social context of background characteristics resonate with institutional theory perspectives, as they provide insight into the willingness of CEOs to deploy resources for strategy implementation (Auh & Menguc, 2009). In a conceptual study grounded on institutional theory, Gyepi-Garbrah and Asamoah (2015) hypothesized CEO functional background as an institutional factor; which was likely to influence IMO. However, the conceptual model which proposed a holistic view of IMO by integrating institutional variables has not been verified empirically.

IMO and the responsibility of managers

The IMO philosophy extends the implementation of IM activities to maintenance of effective coordination of all relationships within and outside the organisation by examining all activities involved in satisfying customers throughout the internal supply chain (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003; Turkoz & Akyol, 2008). This wise, the focus of IMO has been to ensure customer satisfaction and improved an organisation's performance, through regular improvement of the organisation's environment (Ahmed & Rafiq, 2003). Lings (2004) normatively re-conceptualised IM, to the present construct (i.e. the IMO); and suggested three core dimensions as follows: internal market information collection, internal-market communication, and internal response. This core dimension was identified as three primary dimensions or first order constructs of IMO, as follows: Information Generation, Information Dissemination, and Responsiveness to Information; designated as "internal market mix" components (Grönroos, 2006). Further, Lings and Greenley (2005) associated the philosophy with managerial behaviours and employee-employer exchanges, and as a means of harmonizing interaction among different functional areas in the organisation. Thus, IMO represents managers' willingness to create and offer value for the internal market within a broader, relationship-marketing paradigm. In this respect, an organisation's orientation to marketing was assessed on the basis of how managers fulfilled employee needs, similar to the broader MO that focused on meeting customers' needs and expectations (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990).

To determine the role played by managers in IM activities, Mat (2008) used two organisations in retailing to assess the nature of the leadership style and the linkage with the IM concept's effectiveness in the organisation. The positive relationship of IM with achievement-oriented and participative styles provided some insight into the purported relationships. Further, the study noted that the achievement-oriented leadership style was somewhat a better forecaster of IM than the participative style. Conversely, the directive style was negatively associated with IM. The only leadership style that had no significant effect on IM was the supportive style. Consequently, the study concluded that despite the agreement on the importance of leadership in IM, literature on the integration of leaders influence on IM research needed further investigation (Mat, 2008). Grounded on social identity theory perspective, Wieseke, Ahearne, Lam, and van Dick (2009) explained that IM was fundamentally a process in which leaders instilled in followers a sense of oneness within the firm. The Wieseke *et al.* (2009) study concluded that both employees' and sale Managers' organisational identity were positively related to financial performance. Thus, the results of the study provided empirical support regarding the importance of leaders in ensuring member identification, a prerequisite for building a strong foundation for IM.

Perspectives from the upper echelon theory

The literature on the on the upper echelon theory is largely attributed to Hambrick and Mason (1984) for their work on the influence of leaders on strategic vision and the organisational performance. From the perspectives of the upper echelon theory, managers' orientation is aligned to experience, educational background, functional background, and other demographic factors. These characteristics play significant roles in leaders' psychological programming and influence decision-making (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Hambrick, 2007; Jaw & Lin, 2009). Some of these characteristics are: age of team members, tenure, international exposure, and teams' functional heterogeneity. These traits predict organisational outcomes because they influence communication, socio-cognition, conflict management, and information processing competencies of management teams (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2014). Also, Hambrick (2007) indicated that interpretation of the strategic intent was influenced by the CEO

background characteristics and values, and informed the strength of their control on the organisation.

Further, Rodenbach and Brettel (2012) examined the role of CEOs with respect to their experience at a micro-level origin of self-motivated aptitudes in organisations, and noted that CEO's background experience and their influence were determined by environmental conditions. On a similar subject matter, Bell (2013) argued that the selection of leaders and the degree of influence exerted on organisations were not attributable to single functional background expertise, but to multi-functional experience. His argument was grounded on a study conducted by Mullwood Partnership, which revealed that Human Resource Directors might have all the credentials to be the CEOs of the future. Bell (2013) argued that performance at the executive level was attributable to displaying the right behaviours in a particular sector, as well as having experience in that particular position. Using data from India, Agnihotri and Bhattacharya (2014) also extended the application of the upper echelon theory to emerging markets, to consider the effect of top managers' background characteristics on firms' export intensity. From the results, five characteristics of top management: educational level, functional heterogeneity, international exposure, age, and length of tenure were confirmed.

Research objective

The aim of this study is to contribute to the ongoing debate and to address a paucity of empirical research relating to CEO background characteristic and firm performance. Specifically, this study sought to assess the relationship between Marketing background expertise and IMO, in the context of the public sector.

Hypotheses formulation

It is acceptable that the characteristics of managers at the upper echelon of an organisation influence the decision making process (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Invariably, researchers in marketing agree with the upper echelon perspective, to the extent that organisations that are market-oriented are influenced heavily by management's interest and risk aversion (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Notwithstanding, there have been concerns regarding Marketers' decreasing influence at the level of

corporate strategy (Nath & Mahajan, 2008). Prevailing evidence from the literature suggests that CEOs with a strong marketing-inclined background have the tendency to be relation-oriented (Auh & Menguc, 2009). Also, empirical evidence revealed that CEOs functional background expertise influenced the culture, norm, and vision of the firm, to the extent that those with “output” background, such as marketing, tended to focus more on customer relationships, market ‘scanning, growth, creativity, and adaptability (Auh & Menguc, 2009).

In contrast, those with a “through put” background, such as Finance, Accounting, or Law rather assisted with the development of cultures that focused on efficiency, order, and predictability. This position was based on the view that organisations’ strategic direction was a reflection of CEOs values, education and training, to the extent that those with marketing background would support marketing-oriented activities (Park, Auh, & Maher *et al.*, 2012). Rodenbach and Brettel (2012) also included a dimension of the influence of managers’ experience on the development of dynamic competencies, depending on environmental conditions. From the perspectives of IMO, this study proposes a relation between Senior Executives’ marketing background expertise and the individual primary dimensions of IMO (i.e. Information Generation, Information Dissemination, and Responsiveness to Information). This is based on prevailing positions with regard to CEO traits, which are useful in predicting organisational outcomes (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2014).

Generating information entails employees’ perceptions of what their jobs required, the outputs (i.e. what they receive) and the value of this exchange (Lings & Greenley, 2005). Lings and Greenley (2005) noted three aspects of information generation, which included formal information generation, and face-to-face interactions. In light of preceding discussion, this study proposes that:

H1: Marketing background expertise of senior executives positively relate with Information Generation.

Grönroos (2001) argued that no organisation could be absolutely shielded from service competition, and that the core products and services ought to be managed with other corresponding services to offer a total service offering. Thus, an organisation’s success should be determined by efficient combination and management of its offerings. Communication platforms provide avenues through which individuals

and groups within an organisations disseminate information (Johlke & Duhan, 2000), and must be aligned with employee's attitudes with organisational goals. Internal dissemination of information occurs between decision makers or managers and employees on the one hand, and between managers and different functional departments and ranks on the other. Hence, this study hypothesizes that:

H2: Marketing background expertise positively relate with Information Dissemination.

Employers are expected to show responsiveness to information, by designing jobs to meet employee needs; adjusting the remuneration scheme, and offering them the necessary training in order to develop the skills and capabilities that their job descriptions require (Grönroos, 2006). As such, decision makers are expected to give due attention to both the resources and social aspirations of employees to ensure firm productivity. Given that organisations' strategic directions are reflections of CEOs values, education and training; and that those having marketing background would support marketing (Park *et al.*, 2012), we propose that:

H3: Marketing background expertise positively relate with Responsiveness to Information.

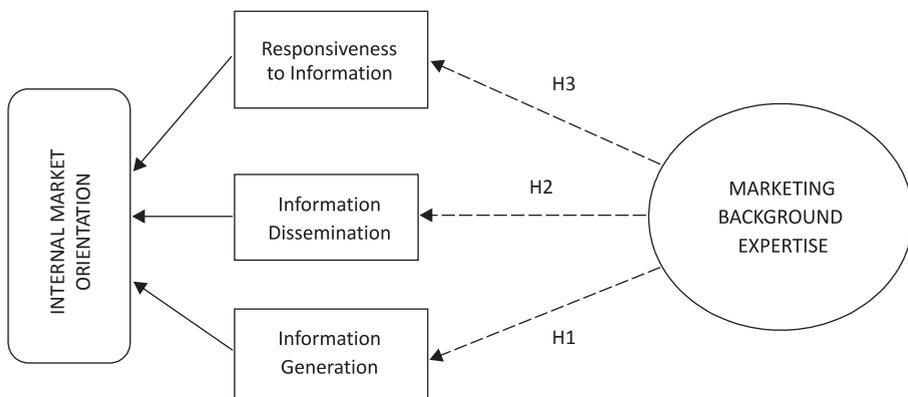


Figure 1. Proposed Correlation model

Source: Authors' own compilation.

The hypotheses are summarised in a correlation model labelled Figure 1.

METHOD

Population and sampling

Senior executives within the Public sector of Ghana constitute the population for this study. In all there are 111 PSOs in Ghana, categorized as follows: Civil Service (CS), sub-vented agencies (SA), and state owned enterprises (SOE). Data collection employed stratified random sampling technique, based on the three strata or categories. Data collection was through administration of questionnaires to the CEOs, Chief Directors, heads of departments, etc.; (referred to as 'Senior Executives. These respondents form the upper echelon of the public sector in Ghana, and are responsible for daily decision making (Waldman, Jarvidan, & Varella, 2004). Going by the sampling size determination criteria by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), we sampled twenty four (24) institutions out of 25 of the CS; forty-eight (48) from the 60 SAs, and eighteen (18) from the 26 SOEs, making a total sample of 90 samples from a population of 111 PSOs. In this study, six (6) questionnaires, representing an average number of Directorates in each PSO were distributed to each of the sampled PSOs (i.e. 90 PSOs), making a total of 540 questionnaires. We tested for non-response bias using Armstrong and Overton's (1977) guidelines. Thus, a series of t-tests were performed, comprising early respondents (the first one-third) with late respondents (the last one-third) on all study constructs. No significant differences were found between the two groups, indicating that non-response bias was not an issue of concern in this study. Demographic characteristics were generated from classification variables (i.e. CS, SA, and SOE; years in employment, gender).

Survey instrument

The study adopted an existing measurement scale by Ruizalba, Bermudez, Rodriguez-Molina, and Blanca (2014) as the survey instrument or questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 24 items covering

the three primary dimensions of IMO (i.e. Information Generation, Information Dissemination, and Responsiveness to Information). IMO was observed as second-order constructs (Gounaris, 2008b; Sanchez-Hernandez & Miranda, 2011), with the item scores reflecting the three dimensions of IMO. The Ruizalba, Bermudez-Gonzalez, Rodriguez-Molina, & Blanca (2014) scale was used because it was developed through refinement of the previous IM instruments (Lings & Greenley, 2005; Gounaris, 2008a), and its construct validity and reliability has been confirmed, albeit in a Spanish banking setting. In order to ascertain the suitability of the items to the setting of this study, a pilot study was undertaken involving 20 senior executives from 10 PSOs. The results suggested that the items were understood, with minor changes. For each primary dimension, the items were measured on the Likert scale anchored 1 = 'completely disagree' to 5 = 'completely agree'. To measure Senior Executives' functional background expertise, we used a dummy variable (Marketing – 1, and non-marketing – 0). The overall Cronbach alpha reliability of items on the primary dimensions of IMO was above 0.8, which was above the cut-off point of 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Data analyses

For descriptive analyses of general background characteristics of respondents, the study used the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) version 18.0 for XP Windows' operating system. Further, Pearson's Correlation was applied to assess the relationship between Marketing background expertise and the primary dimensions of IMO. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, better known as the correlation coefficient or as r , is the most widely used correlation coefficient. The Pearson correlation is performed on the underlying assumption that the data is normally distributed, from the random sampling. Evaluation of correlation coefficient employs the Cohen effect (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) to determine the strength of the relationship, or the effect size. Thus, coefficients between 0.10 and 0.29 represent a small association; coefficients between 0.30 and 0.49 represent a medium association; and coefficients above 0.50 represent a large associate or relationship; while +0.01 to +0.19 represent no/negligible relationship (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003).

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

A total of 252 questionnaires were returned from the 540 distributed, making a response rate of 46.9%. In total, there were 245 usable questionnaires, as seven (7) had missing data, and as such, were disregarded. Percentage distribution of the returned questionnaires was classified as follows: 37.1% from CS; 41.6% from SA, and 21.2% from the SOEs, as depicted in respondents characteristics in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents characteristics

Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Public Sector Organisations		
– Civil Service	91	37.1
– Subvented-agency	102	41.6
– State-owned Enterprise	52	21.2
Gender		
– Male	167	68.2
– Female	78	31.8
Functional Background		
– Marketing	35	14.3
– Non-marketing	210	85.7
No. of Years		
– 1–5 yrs	70	28.6
– 6–10 yrs	57	23.2
– 10 yrs and above	118	48.2

Source: Authors' own compilation.

In terms of gender, 68.2% of the respondents were males and 31.8% were females, reflecting a large number of males in high executive positions in the public sector of Ghana. The work experience of respondents was as follows: 1–5 years was 28.6%; 23.3% had worked from 6 to 10 years; while 48.2% had over 10 years work experience. This shows that almost half of the total respondents had over 10 years of work experience. The majority of the respondents did not have

marketing background expertise, which was reflected as follows: marketing – 14.3%, and non-marketing – 85.7%.

Measurement of Internal Market Orientation

The mean scores obtained through the Likert scale were classified into three groups “below average”(1–2), “average”(3–3.9), and “above average”(4–5) in order for clarity and ease of understanding (Churchill, 1998, p. 325; Kaur, Sharma, & Seli, 2009). The average values of the dimensions of IMO and the levels on the Likert scale are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. IMO (Average)

Description	INFOG		INFOD		RESP	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Completely Disagree	4	1.6	3	1.2	0	0
Disagree	53	21.6	24	9.8	31	12.7
Neither Agree nor Disagree	121	49.4	53	21.6	121	49.4
Agree	64	26.1	148	60.4	91	37.1
Completely Agree	3	1.2	17	6.9	2	.8
Total	245	100.0	245	100.0	245	100.0

Source: Authors' own compilation.

Note: INFOG = Information Generation; INFOD = Information Generation; RESP = Responsiveness to Information.

From Table 3 it was observed that for Information Generation (INFOG) the majority of respondents (49.4%), Neither Agreed nor Disagreed. For Information Dissemination (INFOD), 60.4% of respondents Agree; while for Responsiveness to Information (RESP), 49.4% Agree. These responses translate to an “Average” level of IMO (i.e. 3.36), going by the criteria by Churchill (1998), as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3. IMO Level

Description	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
INFOGAve	3.04	.770	245
INFODAve	3.62	.804	245
RESPAve	3.26	.681	245
IMO Average	3.36	.691	245

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

Correlation

Results of the Pearson’s correlation analyses involving Marketing background expertise and IMO are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation

DESCRIPTION		MARKETING BACKGROUND	INFOG- -Ave	INFOD- -Ave	RESP- -Ave	IMO- -Ave
Marketing Background	Pearson Correlation	1	.041	.033	.100	.058
	Sig. (2-tailed)	–	.521	.605	.117	.366

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors’ own compilation.

From the correlation results, relationship of Marketing Background and INFOG = .041; Marketing and INFOD = 0.033; Marketing Background and RESP = 0.100. Further, the aggregated mean of IMO revealed correlation coefficient of 0.058, and was insignificant (i.e. $p < .366$), indicating negligible association. This corroborates the individual sub-dimensions (i.e. INFOG, INFOD, and RESP) which were all insignificant. Thus, H1, H2, and H3 which hypothesized a direct relationship between marketing background expertise and the primary dimensions of IMO were not confirmed.

DISCUSSION

This study was set out to determine the relationship between marketing background expertise and IMO. The literature suggests that

background characteristics predict organisational outcomes as they influence communication and information processing competencies of the top management team (Agnihotri & Bhattacharya, 2014). Contrary to our expectation, the hypothesized relationships between Marketing background expertise and primary dimensions of IMO were not supported. This result deflates arguments that suggest that marketing background expertise will favour marketing-related activities, propounded by some scholars (e.g. Auh & Menguc, 2009; Park *et al.*, 2012). This finding might be due to clear procedures and guidelines which are usually strictly adhered to within the public sector, and gives credence to suggestions that some organisations did not give enough attention to marketing related activities, despite the pivotal role marketing could play in shaping a firm's strategic direction (Park *et al.*, 2012). Nonetheless, this finding partly corroborates a side of an argument that indicates lack of marketers' influence on strategy implementation, proffered by Nath and Mahajan (2008).

Hence, this study provides empirical evidence in support of the on-going discourse on the influence of CEOs functional background characteristics on firm performance, within the context of the public sector, where research on IM has been limited. It also refines these discussions from both a non-western and a developing economy's context. Despite the contribution of this research, the study is limited in a number of ways. Since this work is entirely based on evidence from public sector institutions, results should be interpreted and generalised with thoughtfulness. Hence, Managers seeking to improve on business performance must be cautious in assuming that firm performance would be achieved by aligning specific background expertise to strategy implementation. Hence, further research should assess the moderating role of marketing background expertise on the relationship between IMO and firm performance, for clearer understanding of the role of managers' background expertise in IM. Future studies should also examine similar relationships within a wider context, including organisations from different sectors and heterogeneous background expertise, for much broader perspective.

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JAKI JEST ZWIĄZEK POMIĘDZY POCHODZENIEM I ORIENTACJĄ NA SPECJALIZACJĘ OBROTU NA RYNEK WEWNĘTRZNY?

Abstrakt

Tło badań. Zorientowanie na Rynek Wewnętrzny stanowi filozofię, która ma stwarzać bezproblemowy związek pomiędzy różnymi obszarami funkcjonalnymi w organizacji, mając na uwadze osiągnięcie lepszych wyników organizacji. Prowadzona jest jednak ciągła debata, oparta na teorii wyższego szczebla, w odniesieniu do tego, w jaki sposób charakterystyka wykształcenia liderów wpływa na wyniki; chociaż ma to ograniczone empiryczne wsparcie.

Cel badań. W niniejszej pracy poszukuje się oceny związku pomiędzy kompetencjami związanymi z wykształceniem marketingowym personelu kierowniczego a Zorientowaniem na Rynek Wewnętrzny, w kontekście sektora publicznego.

Metodologia. Dane z badań ankietowych zostały zebrane od personelu kierowniczego sektora publicznego Ghany i objęły one 111 organizacji; przy zastosowaniu kwestionariusza strukturalnego. Przyjęta hipoteza o związkach pomiędzy kompetencjami związanymi z wykształceniem marketingowym a podstawowymi wymiarami Zorientowania na Rynek Wewnętrzny została zbadana poprzez analizę korelacji liniowej Pearsona.

Kluczowe wnioski. Analizy danych ujawniają brak wsparcia dla przyjętej hipotezy o związkach kompetencji związanych z wykształceniem marketingowym a podstawowymi wymiarami Zorientowania na Rynek Wewnętrzny. Badania zapewniają jednak empiryczne wsparcie dla toczącego się dyskursu na temat charakterystyki kierownictwa i wyników firmy, w kontekście sektora publicznego; gdzie badania nad Wewnętrznym Marketingiem są ograniczone. Ponadto udoskonalają one te dyskusje zarówno z perspektywy gospodarek spoza Zachodu, jak i krajów rozwijających się.

Słowa kluczowe: Zorientowanie na Rynek Wewnętrzny, wyższy szczebel, wykształcenie marketingowe, personel kierowniczy, sektor publiczny.