

# SEGMENTI U MARKETINGU NA TEMELJU PERCEPCIJE ZNAČAJA MARKETINŠKIH ZNANJA I VJEŠTINA

## SEGMENTS OF MARKETERS BASED ON A PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

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*marketinška znanja, marketinške vještine*

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### SAŽETAK

Svrha je ovog članka definirati i empirijski verificirati niz znanja i vještina kako bismo mogli segmentirati marketinške profesionalce na temelju njihove percepcije važnosti marketinških znanja i vještina. Za empirijsku potvrdu važnosti marketinških znanja i vještina razvijen je instrument s 28 varijabla. Uzorak uključuje 235 potpredsjednika marketinga, direktora marketinga i prodaje te predsjednika ili direktora/vlasnika poduzeća u Sloveniji (11,8% stopa odgovora). Rezultati otkrivaju četiri segmenta u marketingu: marketinški stručnjaci, marketinški "generalisti", "nemarketingaši" i marketinški "generali". Osnovne vještine rukovođenja ocijenjene su visoko, uz znanje i vještine vezane za konkurenciju i tržišnu poziciju poduzeća. U skladu s općim predrasudama o marketingu, vještina kreativnog razmišljanja

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to define and empirically verify a range of knowledge and skills which are necessary in order to segment marketers, based on their perceptions of the importance of such marketing knowledge and skills. To empirically verify the importance of marketing knowledge and skills, a 28-item measurement instrument was developed. Responses from 235 marketing vice-presidents, marketing directors, sales directors or company presidents/owners in Slovenia were obtained (an 11.8% total response rate). The results reveal four clusters of marketers: marketing specialists, marketing generalists, non-marketers and marketing generals. General and leadership skills are highly evaluated, together with the knowledge and skills related to competition and the company's

vrlo je važna, posebice u segmentu marketinških "generalista". No, znanje i vještine vezane uz ponašanje potrošača i marketinška komunikacija manje su važni, pogotovo za marketinške generale i "nemarketingaše". Iz istraživanja proizlaze stanovite marketinške implikacije za obrazovanje i praksu.

market position. Consistent with the general prejudice about marketing people, creative thinking skills and imagination are very important, especially to marketing generalists in our survey. Yet, the knowledge and skills related to consumer behaviour and marketing communication are less important, especially to marketing generals and non-marketers. Certain implications for marketing education and practice arise from the survey.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the marketing function in organisations is changing due to a greater prominence of marketing as a process that all organisational functions deploy.<sup>1</sup> However, professionals in law, accountancy or human resources are more likely to be promoted to the top positions in organisations than marketing specialists because of "a widespread cultural prejudice, which does not recognise the professionalism and skills of marketing specialists".<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this article is to define and empirically verify a range of knowledge and skills which are perceived as important by marketing specialists themselves. These may be gained either through formal or informal education and study. The focus is on a perceived importance for marketing practitioners' decision-making and work in general.

Marketing knowledge can be described as conceptual knowledge, based on marketing theory. It is an explicit type of knowledge that can be formulated, documented, coded, preserved or transmitted. It enables marketers' decision-making and supports their work in general. Skills, on the other hand, are developed abilities that can mainly be improved through practice. They are composed of potential, talent and experience.<sup>3</sup> Marketers need skills in order to transform knowledge into efficient realisation. A range of marketing knowledge and skills includes both general knowledge and skills, e.g. leadership skills, communication skills, interpersonal skills and analytical skills,<sup>4</sup> and more specific knowledge and skills, e.g. the ability and willingness to learn about product-markets, to solve marketing problems and to possess knowledge of marketing subject areas. In order to progress to senior posts, marketers should demonstrate management and leadership skills, together with strategic thinking and have knowledge of consumer behaviour, product and brand management, communication and promotion and strategic planning.<sup>5</sup>

Rossiter defines four forms of marketing knowledge: marketing concepts, structural frameworks, strategic principles and research principles. Based on some criticism, he later added empirical generalisations.<sup>6</sup>

Marketing knowledge is developed and spread by academics and consultants while being used by companies and managers as declarative knowledge ("know what"), and should be distinguished from procedural knowledge ("know how").<sup>7</sup> A range of criticisms of this interpretation pointed to the exclusion of empirical facts, generalisations and theories,<sup>8</sup> marketing knowledge accumulation<sup>9</sup> and its restriction only to academic marketing knowledge as a synonym for marketing science.<sup>10</sup> Restricting marketing knowledge to academic marketing knowledge is unnecessary and is certainly not productive.<sup>11</sup> Marketing practitioners should have more knowledge than only that arising from academic research. Since marketing science is a young discipline, it is currently unable to offer sufficient directions for a successful work of marketers. Wierenga defines marketing knowledge as "*all the insights and convictions about marketing phenomena that marketing managers use or can use for making marketing decisions*" and divides marketing knowledge into academic marketing knowledge and the marketing knowledge used by practitioners.<sup>12</sup> Practitioners should apply expertise/experience, mental models, analogies, intuition and creativity – which all contribute to the definition and resolution of marketing problems. The fact that two special issues of the Marketing Intelligence & Planning Journal in 2004 and 2006 were devoted to marketing knowledge, the applicability of academic marketing knowledge<sup>13</sup> and to the suitability of marketing education as an important mediator of marketing knowledge for marketing practice<sup>14</sup> certainly points to the importance of this topic for marketing academics and practitioners.

On the other hand, skills can generally be divided into discipline-related and support skills. Through the practice of marketing-related knowledge, marketing-related skills are developed, e.g. segmenting a market, market planning etc. Support skills, e.g. interpersonal skills, creativity, critical thinking and decision-making, are transferable across disciplines<sup>15</sup> and are also called generic managerial skills.<sup>16</sup> While employers look for transferable skills, contributing to the adaptability of employees, most graduates in marketing hold substantial marketing knowledge whereas their skills are not developed sufficiently by the time they complete their studies.<sup>17</sup>

A thorough overview of the essential knowledge areas and skills of marketing managers from the literature is presented in Table 1. When defining essential knowledge areas and skills, it is necessary to determine their importance. The research shows that general knowledge and skills are the most important and most valued, e.g. communication skills, self-imitativeness and analytical capabilities.<sup>18</sup> The basic knowledge areas which are specific to marketers include marketing communications, marketing research and consumer behaviour. In order to progress, young marketers should develop leadership skills, a strategic way of thinking, and obtain knowledge on strategic marketing, marketing communications, product and brand management and consumer behaviour. Marketing managers mostly need the knowledge and skills related to market analysis, marketing planning and decision-making for success.<sup>19</sup> In this article we

investigate the importance of marketing knowledge and skills amongst marketers in the case of Slovenia. The following hypothesis will be tested:

*H: The majority of marketers find general capabilities (skills and knowledge) to be the most important for their effective work, and more important than specific marketing knowledge and skills.*

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

To empirically verify the importance of marketing knowledge and skills, a 28-item measurement instrument (on a 7-point scale from 1=not important at all, to 7=very important) was developed from a literature review<sup>20</sup> and field interviews with 10 marketing man-

**Table 1:** Marketing managers' knowledge areas and skills

Knowledge areas	Skills
Strategic marketing	Leadership skills
International and export marketing	Strong organisational skills
Business-to-business marketing	Oral communication skills
Consumer behaviour	Written communication skills
Product and brand management	Ability to think strategically
Pricing	Problem-solving ability
Market research and analysis	Negotiation skills
Personal selling and sales management	Independent judgement
Societal and ethical issues in marketing	Ability to be creative
Innovation and new product development	Skills to implement change
Services marketing	Customer service focus
Marketing logistics/distribution	Multi-disciplinary perspective
Marketing communications	Analytical skills
Retail marketing and management	Flexibility and adaptability
Direct marketing	Awareness of ethical issues
Internet marketing	Strong interpersonal skills
	Wide awareness and understanding of business
	Ability to work under pressure
	Planning skills
	Sales management skills

Source: Gray, B.J., Ottesen, G.G., Bell, J., Chapman, C., Whiten, G.: What are the essential capabilities of marketers?, **Marketing Intelligence & Planning**, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2007, pp. 280.

agers. Besides knowledge and skills, some additional characteristics of individuals that are usually part of the analysis of knowledge and skills were included in the instrument<sup>21</sup> (see Table 2). A mail survey was conducted by the Institute of Marketing of the Faculty of Economics in January-February 2006. The survey included a cross-industry stratified random sample of 2,000 firms based on company size. The marketing vice-president, marketing director, sales director or company president/owner (for small firms) were approached. Responses from 235 companies were received (representing an 11.8% total response rate). The structure of the sample was representative for Slovenian companies with more than 10 employees by company size and industry. The sample consisted of 25% large companies, 43% medium-sized and 32% small companies; 39% were manufacturing companies, 22% retail companies, 11% business services, 10% construction companies, 6% financial services, 5% hospitality industry and 7% companies from other industries. Data were analysed by SPSS 12.0. Factor analysis was used for data reduction and summarisation in order to reduce a large number of variables to a manageable level of underlying factors. Additionally, cluster analysis was made to identify and describe segments of marketers who value different areas of marketing knowledge and skills similarly.

### 3. FINDINGS

The analysis revealed four underlying factors from a range of marketing knowledge and skills (EFA, PAF with a Varimax rotation). These four factors explain the correlations among the investigated variables (see Table 2 for the average values and factor loadings):

1. General and leadership capabilities.
2. Marketing knowledge and skills with an emphasis on understanding consumers and marketing communications.
3. Marketing knowledge and skills with an emphasis on understanding the competition, market and market position.
4. Specific marketing knowledge and skills.

*The first factor of general and leadership capabilities* includes general socio-ethical principles, points of view and interpersonal capabilities which are generally the most important among the knowledge areas and skills included in the survey. A strong connection to market and consumers should be related to strategic thinking and planning and to a wide business overview. The marketing manager should be reliable and responsible, able to motivate others and be a team player, able to act in crises and be committed to quality. These are the characteristics usually attributed to leaders in general, not only or specifically to marketing managers.

*The second factor of marketing knowledge and skills with an emphasis on understanding consumers and marketing communications* is composed of the knowledge of marketing communications (knowledge about planning marketing communication programmes and about determining efficiency and effectiveness of marketing communications), customer behaviour, analytical skills and familiarity with marketing tools and approaches in general. The most important ability included in this factor is, however, the ability to be creative and imaginative. Overall, the capabilities making up the second factor are more specific to marketing managers than the first factor, linking creative and analytical skills with information on consumers and distributors.

*The third factor of marketing knowledge and skills with an emphasis on understanding the competition, market and market position* is again composed of specific marketing knowledge and skills, including how to identify market opportunities, determine competitive advantages, analyse the competition and build long-term relationships with distribution.

*Finally, the fourth factor of specific marketing knowledge and skills* is composed of diverse components, which can be found specifically at some companies, e.g. CRM, sensitivity to multicultural differences and experience from several industries. All these items rank relatively low by their average importance compared to the other items.

**Table 2:** Rotated Factor Matrix

Importance of marketing knowledge and capabilities	Mean	Factors			
		1	2	3	4
Being reliable and responsible	6.52**	.637			
Understanding not only what this company does but also how and why (wide business overview)	6.39**	.588			
Able to motivate and make others enthusiastic	6.34**	.579			
Strategic thinking and planning	6.34**	.568			
Strong interpersonal communication skills	6.29**	.491			
Team player	6.25**	.613			
Able to think and act effectively in crises	6.21**	.614			
Commitment to quality	6.12*	.634			
Being moral or ethical	6.03*	.661			
Obeying the law and regulations	5.94*	.603			
Being realistic	5.90*	.634			
Able to think creatively and imaginatively	6.26**		.493		
Know how to select target segments	6.14*		.565		
Know marketing tools and approaches	5.84*		.622		
Know how to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing communications	5.80		.811		
Know how to find feedback from consumers	5.79		.661		
Know to predict consumer behaviour, behaviour of distributors and competitors	5.79		.454		
Able to select and analyse relevant information about markets	5.64		.561		
Devote enough time to strategic marketing decision-making	5.63		.663		
Know how to plan marketing communication programmes	5.26		.675		
Know to identify market opportunities	6.39**			.545	
Know how to determine competitive advantages	6.38**			.559	
Know how to analyse the competition	6.07*			.643	
Know how to build long-term relationships with distribution	5.93*			.420	
Know how to perform basic financial calculations (e.g. break-even point)	5.42			.411	
Have experience from several industries	5.51				.449
Manage and apply customer databases (CRM)	5.44				.605
Being sensitive to multicultural differences	4.72				.441
% of variance explained by each factor after rotation (cumulative %)	51.5	18.8	17.5	9.7	5.5

Scale: 1=not important at all, to 7=very important; Method of extraction: PAF, rotation Varimax.

The variables with the highest mean are marked (\*\* – mean is higher than 6, \* - mean is equal to 6).

Source: Research

Squared Euclidian distance was used as a similarity measure for cluster analysis of the respondents in the survey, and Ward's method of hierarchical clustering for computing distances between clusters on a 28-item measurement instrument. The analysis revealed four clusters of marketing managers with regard to how they value different marketing knowledge and skills. Average values for each segment are shown in Table 3. To test homogeneity within a specific segment and differences among segments, Student-Newman-Keuls and Sheffe tests were used (test results have been omitted for reasons of space and can be provided by authors upon request).

### **1<sup>st</sup> Segment (Marketing knowledge and skills are the most important = "Marketing specialists")**

Marketers in the first segment value all marketing knowledge and skills (factor 2 and 3), as opposed to general and leadership capabilities (factor 1) and specific marketing knowledge and skills (factor 4). Some marketing skills, such as creativity, analytical skills and devoting enough time to strategic marketing decision-making, are also less important compared to the second segment. Being moral or ethical, realistic, committed to quality, team player, reliable and responsible, able to think and act effectively in crises and having a wide business overview is also seen as less important. An analysis of demographic data shows this group to be composed of younger marketers with higher education, social sciences graduates, who work as heads of departments or project managers. This finding is consistent with the literature in the sense that younger employees bring new knowledge to the company while their transferable skills are usually developed later in their careers. This cluster is named "marketing specialists" since they are highly (marketing) educated and use mostly marketing knowledge and skills at their work in marketing departments. Since marketing has been lectured at universities in Slovenia for only the last 15 years, it is not surprising for younger generations to be bringing new marketing knowledge to their working environments. Specific marketing knowledge (factor 4) is not important for them since they probably have not had enough opportunities to gain specific knowledge from different industries or international environment.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Segment (Everything is important or Marketing knowledge and skills are important as well as General and leadership capabilities = "Marketing generalists")**

The second segment is similar to the first segment when it comes to the evaluation of marketing knowledge and skills (factor 2 in 3), the difference is that they value general and leadership capabilities and specific marketing knowledge and skills at their work too. An analysis of demographic characteristics of the representatives of this segment shows an above average share of women, employees in service sectors and small companies. This may be due to increased interaction with consumers in service sectors and to increased competition which calls for hiring the most competitive employees. This segment is named "marketing generalists", since they value highly all aspects of marketing knowledge and skills as well as general skills. This may also show that marketing is a strongly diversified occupation, which demands a wide variety of different knowledge and skills.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Segment (Nothing is important = "Non marketers")**

Opposite to the second segment is the third segment, which evaluated almost all the knowledge and skills presented with the lowest scores compared to the other three segments. It is a relatively small segment in the total sample. On the basis of demographic data, we can say that these are the participants with a background in economics who are employed in other departments (sales, purchasing), which have traditionally unfavourable views of or conflicts with marketing. We name the segment "non (real)-marketers". Surprisingly, they also evaluate general capabilities as less important.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Segment (General and leadership capabilities are the most important = "Marketing generals")**

The fourth segment values general and leadership capabilities more than others. It also values marketing knowledge and skills though, but only those with an emphasis on understanding the competition, market and the company's market position (factor 3). The latter are of similar importance to them as they are to the first and the second segment. An analysis of

**Table 3:** Results of Cluster analysis

Variable	Marketing specialists	Marketing generalists	Non-marketers	Marketing generals	Average values for total sample
<b>Share of the cluster in the whole sample</b>	<b>29,4 %</b>	<b>27,9 %</b>	<b>9,3 %</b>	<b>33,3 %</b>	<b>100,0 %</b>
Being moral or ethical	5,33-	6,51+	5,26-	6,28+	5,97
Strong interpersonal communication skills	6,08+	6,67	5,53-	6,28	6,26
Obedying the law and regulations	5,32	6,60+	4,68-	6,31+	5,95
Being reliable and responsible	6,18	6,91+	5,37-	6,76+	6,50
Understanding not only what this company does but also how and why (wide business overview)	5,90	6,91+	5,42-	6,60+	6,37
Being realistic	5,08-	6,58+	4,74-	6,21+	5,84
Being a team player	5,82-	6,75+	5,58-	6,31	6,22
Commitment to quality	5,55-	6,60+	5,32-	6,38+	6,10
Able to think and act effectively in crises	5,92	6,75+	4,58-	6,38	6,18
Able to motivate and make others enthusiastic	6,12	6,77+	5,63-	6,38	6,34
Strategic thinking and planning	6,20	6,86+	5,11-	6,34	6,33
Know how to plan marketing communication programmes	5,82+	6,09+	4,16-	4,43-	5,27
Know how to find feedback from consumers	6,25+	6,72+	4,58-	5,04-	5,82
Know how to determine the efficiency and effectiveness of marketing communications	6,42+	6,68+	4,84-	4,90-	5,84
Know how to select target segments	6,40+	6,67+	4,89-	5,84	6,15
Know to predict consumer behaviour, behaviour of distributors and competitors	6,00+	6,44+	3,84-	5,69+	5,82
Know marketing tools and approaches	5,97	6,56+	4,63-	5,44	5,83
Devote enough time to strategic marketing decision-making	5,75	6,68+	4,26-	5,06	5,64
Able to select and analyse relevant information about markets	5,80	6,54+	3,74-	5,18	5,61
Able to think creatively and imaginatively	6,18	6,74+	5,63-	6,09	6,25
Know how to determine competitive advantages	6,48+	6,72+	4,95-	6,37+	6,37
Know how to build long-term relationships with distribution	5,92+	6,30+	4,05-	5,99+	5,87
Know to identify market opportunities	6,62+	6,75+	4,74-	6,37+	6,40
Know how to analyse the competition	6,23+	6,47+	3,79-	6,21+	6,06
Know how to perform basic financial calculations (e.g. break-even point)	5,30	6,02	3,47-	5,47	5,39
Being sensitive to multicultural differences	4,72	5,63+	2,89-	4,35	4,68
Manage and apply customer databases (CRM)	5,77	6,54+	3,79-	4,68	5,44
Have experience from several industries	5,02-	6,18+	5,00-	5,54-	5,51

Scale: 1=not important at all, to 7=very important; Cluster analysis: Ward method, squared Euclidean distance.

The variables with above average values are marked (+) and below average values (-).

Source: Research



demographic data shows this segment to include mostly men with a science-technical educational background, employed in manufacturing companies, above 40 years old, employed in the company for 16 years or more as a company director. According to Kotler,<sup>22</sup> we could name this segment "marketing generals": men in senior posts, doing managerial work and using mostly their skills and vast work experience for their everyday work. They seem to be interested specifically in the side of marketing which focuses on increasing market competitiveness while paying less attention to the knowledge and skills related to understanding consumers, analysing their behaviour or communicating with them.

## 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results reveal that from the range of knowledge and skills which are important for marketers and which were included in our survey, the general and leadership skills are highly evaluated, together with the knowledge and skills related to the competition and the company's market position (e.g. know how to identify market opportunities, determine competitive advantages, think strategically and demonstrate strong interpersonal communication skills). It seems that the so-called support skills or generic managerial skills are seen as being the most important by the marketing managers in our survey. Specifically, marketing generals and marketing generalists, who together represent more than 60% of our sample, evaluate general and leadership capabilities as the most important. In line with our hypothesis, general capabilities are evaluated as more important than specific marketing knowledge and skills by the majority of marketers. Consistent with the general prejudice, creative thinking skills and imagination are very important, especially to marketing generalists. Although these are support skills, creativity might be seen as even closer to discipline-related skills when we talk about marketing. However, the knowledge and skills related to consumer behaviour, marketing research and analysis (e.g. how to select and analyse relevant information about markets) and marketing communication (e.g. know how to measure the

efficiency and effectiveness of marketing communication, predict consumer behaviour and gather information from consumers) are less important, especially to marketing generals and non-marketers.

The majority of knowledge areas and skills included in the survey were evaluated as important. A wide awareness and understanding of the business is important for marketing managers' work but they should also have the ability to think strategically, solve problems and work under pressure. At the same time, marketing managers should be aware of ethical issues. Also, in the general set of knowledge areas, some elements of product and brand management knowledge as well as knowledge about societal and ethical issues in marketing should be covered.

It is interesting to find that strategic thinking and planning are regarded as being of topmost importance for marketing managers' work, although the ability to devote enough time to strategic marketing decision-making was ranked at the bottom. It seems that strategic thinking is evaluated as important; however, not enough time is devoted to its implementation or to decision-making in general.

Several authors ascertain that, among practitioners, there is insufficient recognition of specific, discipline-related marketing knowledge and skills.<sup>23</sup> General knowledge and skills, including leadership, communication and analytical skills, were seen as important and this is consistent with comparable research. It is interesting to find that in our case socio-ethical views (e.g. commitment to quality, ethical stands, respect for the law and regulations) are also declared very important to marketers when doing their job and interacting with consumers. Yet, the fact that the "marketing specialists" segment does not identify the ethical side of the marketing as very important is quite worrying. This may lead to a collision with consumers since the marketing function has much influence on their lives (especially through marketing communications and research). More specific marketing knowledge and skills, e.g. knowledge about customers, are perceived to be less important. This might reveal a relative weakness of Slovenian marketers: not knowing enough about their

customers' needs and wants. Specifically, it is seen in the case of "marketing generals" segment that they have not yet internalised marketing thinking. The fact that these are company leaders, who can empower the marketing function or lead it in the wrong direction by not being able to listen and adapt to consumer needs, is a cause for concern. Furthermore, analytical capabilities scored in the lower third in terms of importance in our survey although they may also be found to be the most important in comparable research. Knowledge of how to perform basic financial calculations is also at the very bottom of the scale of importance of marketing knowledge and skills. It is somewhat worrying that the knowledge and skills related to consumer behaviour, analytical skills and basic financial break-even calculations are less important to practitioners. This may be seen as a serious limitation for marketers in times when more accountability in marketing activities and investments is required.<sup>24</sup> Also, without a focus on consumers and relying on relevant information about consumer needs and wants, marketers are vulnerable in today's highly competitive markets. The most flexible segment is "marketing generalists", who use marketing knowledge and skills at their work as well as general capabilities. We can only wish to find more people who can successfully combine marketing knowledge and skills at their work in marketing positions in companies.

There are some limitations of the present study that should be exposed. The results are based on participants' self-perceptions, where the perceived importance may differ from the actual importance of knowledge and skills that influence actual behaviour of marketing managers. Also, results refer to the marketing managers working in companies with ten and more employees; therefore, they do not correspond to a substantial group of smaller, micro companies and entrepreneurs. With regard to the research instrument, it should be noted that it was applied as part of an extensive survey of the role of marketing and market-

ing communications in companies, so the space for the topic of knowledge and skills was limited.

The survey opens new areas of research. It would be interesting to gain additional insights into marketers' knowledge and skills, combined with their personal characteristics. For further implications for marketing education and practice, different opinions about the importance of marketing knowledge and skills should be obtained from different stakeholders, including marketing students, marketing graduates, marketing employees and academics. It is evident from the literature that the importance of knowledge and skills differs among groups. Further research could also cover the following:

- How to improve marketing knowledge and skills, e.g. with experience and learning,
- Which knowledge and skills bring actual success at work and
- How knowledge and skills differ in different times and places (e.g. in recession as opposed to a period of economic growth).

To summarise, the results of the research offer us a good starting point for considering potential changes in higher education (putting more emphasis on improving marketing skills, analytical skills, financial implications and devoting more time to the ethical aspects of marketing) and marketing education for employees (with an emphasis on education of senior management about the importance of consumers and satisfaction of their needs as well about the financial and analytical side of marketing). The results provide insights into a general state of marketing and marketing knowledge and skills in Slovenian companies, where marketers evaluate general knowledge and skills as being more important than analytical skills or specific marketing knowledge. In the circumstances in which marketing should become more analytical and its results measurable, this could potentially increase difficulties when adjusting to changes.

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