Making marketing happen: How great medical companies make strategic marketing planning work for them

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Abstract   This is the third in a trilogy of papers reporting a five-year research project into marketing strategy making in medical markets. Following on from the weaknesses in marketing strategy observed in the first paper, and the strategy making process weaknesses identified in the second, this paper presents an empirically derived process for creating strong marketing strategy in medical markets. This process involves the replacement of a traditional rational planning process with a hybrid marketing strategy making process adapted to both the organisational culture and the market environment. These findings are of practical use to marketers in the pharmaceutical, medical device, diagnostic and related sectors.

INTRODUCTION

This is the third paper of a trilogy, which seeks to contribute to the improvement of marketing strategy making in medical markets. For the purposes of this work, medical markets are defined as those markets in which the customer is a clinician, related professional or associated organisation. It therefore includes pharmaceuticals, medical devices, diagnostics, medical equipment and other similar areas. This trilogy of papers arises from a five-year research project aimed specifically at this area and involving many leading companies in the sector. Although complementary and to some extent overlapping, the three papers attempt to answer three distinct questions:

- *How good is marketing strategy in medical markets?* Paper one[1] presented an assessment of marketing strategy quality in medical markets against a set of context independent quality criteria derived from the literature. Its conclusions were that marketing strategy in the sector was of variable quality and often very weak.
- *Why is marketing strategy in medical markets of variable quality?* Paper two[2] considered the underlying reasons for variability in the quality of marketing strategy in medical markets and developed and justified a model (the combined congruency model) to explain that variability.
- *How might marketing strategy in medical markets be improved?* This paper develops the empirical work into a management process by which to improve marketing strategy making in medical markets and to test the outputs of that process prior to incurring the costs and risks of implementation.

Given the weaknesses of marketing strategy observed in medical markets

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reported in the first paper and the explanation for that weakness uncovered in the second, this work proposes empirically based guidelines for creating strong marketing strategy in medical markets. In particular, this work seeks to show how companies might develop a hybrid marketing strategy making process that is bicongruent, that is, simultaneously appropriate to both the external market conditions and the prevailing organisational culture.

THE NATURE AND ORIGINS OF WEAK MARKETING STRATEGY

The characteristics of marketing strategy strength and the origins of strategy weakness are described both in the preceding two papers in this series and in the PhD which underlies them,[3] a short summary of that work is appropriate here to help the reader understand the context of the recommendations made in this paper. (The findings arise from the five-year study into the sector carried out as a PhD at Cranfield School of Management in the UK, under the supervision of Professor Malcolm McDonald.)

If strategy is a sustained pattern of resource allocation[4] then marketing strategy is that set of resource allocations concerning customers and propositions to those customers. Hence, the content of marketing strategy can be said to have two component parts; the definition of target customers and the definition of the propositions made to them. Note that this definition concerns the content of marketing strategy and is distinct from any discussion of the process used to create that strategy. Further, this definition of marketing strategy meets the traditional criterion of any good definition, namely that it allow us to distinguish marketing strategy from other constructs with which it might be confused, such as marketing objectives or tactics.[5,6]

Using this definition is also useful in helping us to characterise strong and weak marketing strategies. The strategy content literature contains a broad consensus as to the properties exhibited by a strong strategy in contrast to a weak strategy. These are described in the first paper of this trilogy, and a subset of these properties was used in this research to assess the strategy quality of a wide range of companies in medical markets. The properties are summarised in Table 1, which is reproduced from the earlier paper.

A comparison of marketing strategy properties of the companies studied is shown in Table 2.

It was clear from the research findings that strong marketing strategy quality is notable for its rarity in this sector. Further, it was noted that marketing strategy quality was not related to any particular characteristic of the organisation, such as size or market sector. Nor was the marketing strategy making process used simply associated with the strength of the resultant marketing strategy. It was noted that all of the organisations studied employed a hybrid marketing strategy making process, as observed by many earlier researchers, consisting of some blend of rational, visionary or incremental processes. This hybrid marketing strategy making process (HMSMP) is summarised in Figure 1.

Based on an extensive base of previous research, it was hypothesised that this weakness could be attributable to lack of effectiveness of the marketing strategy making process employed. In particular, that the existing marketing strategy making process was compromised by conflict with either the prevailing market conditions or the extant organisational culture. This hypothesis was developed into the combined congruency model, as described in the second paper of this trilogy and shown in Figure 2.

As concluded in that paper, this model is supported by the empirical data and

Table 1: The properties of a strong marketing strategy

Strategy property	References
Market definition Effective strategies direct resource allocation across markets by making explicit those markets that will receive resources and those that will not.	'domain'[7] 'identifiable'[8] 'product market scope'[9] 'decision on concentration'[10] 'market positioning'[11] 'market definition'[12]
Definition of intended competitive advantage Effective strategies direct resource allocation across internal functions by making explicit the nature of intended competitive advantage.	'competitive advantages'[13] 'advantage'[14] 'competitive advantages'[15] 'decision on concentration'[16] 'product positioning'[17] 'the value proposition'[18] 'market discipline'[19]
Internal consistency and synergy Effective strategies enable efficiency by minimising internal conflicts between areas of activity and optimising synergy between areas of activity.	'synergy'[20] 'consistency'[21] 'synergy parenting'[22]
Degree of uniqueness Effective strategies minimise the effects of competition by focusing resources and activity in a way that is significantly different from that of competitors.	'unique'[23] 'rests on unique activities'[24] 'as different as legitimately possible'[25]
Fit with the external environment Effective strategies leverage relative organisational strengths against relevant market opportunities and either negate or correct relative organisational weaknesses against likely market threats.	'resource deployments'[26] 'fully exploits opportunities'[27] 'consonance'[28] 'suitability'[29] 'synergy'[30]
Consistency with the organisation's objectives Effective strategies define a target market that is sufficiently large, and a value proposition that is sufficiently strong, relative to the competition, to win a market share that is in accordance with the organisation's objectives.	'appropriate to the values of the key managers' and 'appropriate to the desired level of contribution to society'[31] 'consistency' and 'attractiveness'[32]
Acceptability of risk level Effective strategies involve a level of risk that is within the organisation's limits of acceptability.	'level of risk feasible'[33] 'acceptability'[34]
Feasibility within the organisation's resources Effective strategies are executable within the resources available to the organisation.	'consistent with competencies and resources'[35] 'feasible'[36] 'feasibility'[37]
Provision of a level of guidance to tactical activity Effective strategies facilitate their own implementation by providing clear guidance as to what tactical activity is necessary for and appropriate to the execution of the strategy.	'stimulate organisational activity' and 'internally consistent'[38] 'growth vector'[39] 'marketing mix'[40] 'the key relationships'[41]

provides a more contingency based (that is, specific to the context of the situation) perspective on how and why marketing strategy making processes lead to marketing strategies of varying strength. Further, the combined congruency model suggests an approach to marketing strategy making that is more effective than other more prescriptive approaches.

CREATING A BETTER PROCESS FOR MAKING MARKETING STRATEGY

The work summarised above and expanded upon in the previous papers gives an evidence based explanation of why companies make weak strategies. In short, weak strategies arise from strategy making processes that do not fit with the market,

Table 2: A comparison of strategy properties

Strategy properties examined, in terms of idealised description from the literature	Characteristics of strong strategies found in this study	Characteristics of moderate strategies found in this study	Characteristics of weak strategies found in this study
The target market(s) are defined as groups of customers that are broadly homogeneous in their needs.	Target markets are defined by a tight product definition, but with additional focussing according to behaviour and attitudes.	Target markets are defined by product, but systematic targeting of resource is according to sales potential.	Target markets are defined by a product definition and no sub-targeting is visible within that.
The value proposition(s) are tailored to the specific needs of the target(s), across the breadth of the marketing mix.	A core product proposition is clearly 'tiered' by levels of augmented product such as service and support. Alternatively, target customers are allowed to 'tailor' propositions individually. There is clear evidence of alliances or other means of enabling the augmented product.	There is crude 'rationing' of a fairly standard service and support offer according to potential, usually carried out at sales team level.	The proposition is largely standard across the customer base, with minimal tailoring of price at sales team level.
The choice of target(s) and proposition(s) allows leverage of organisational strengths and minimisation of organisational weaknesses.	There is tightly defined focus, based on a combination of tangible and 'cultural' strengths, combined with de facto avoidance of less attractive segments.	'Accidental' alignment is caused by the de facto selection by customers in the context of differentiated competitors.	There is poor appreciation of relative strengths and weaknesses, with alignment only at sales level.
The choice of target(s) and proposition(s) is significantly different from that of the competition.	Initial targeting is similar to that of the competition, but with sub-targeting on different motivational criteria. There are similar core product propositions but with distinctly different augmented products.	Very similar explicit targeting and propositions to the competition is improved by targeting and proposition refinement, within narrow limits, at sales team level.	Target description is identical to that of the competition and there is little proposition differentiation; often driven by 'market follower' or benchmarking activity.

the culture or both. This finding was a major goal, but not the sole aim, of this work. Its intent was to gain insight into how companies with strong marketing strategies adapt their marketing strategy making processes to create bicongruence and thence a strong marketing strategy.

The finding of the research, which in total included over 30 companies and over 100 individuals, showed that strong strategy was the result of congruency between the hybrid marketing strategy making process and both the external market environment and the internal organisational culture. This phenomenon of bicongruency appeared for the most part to be the result of an implicit process

of adaptation of the process to the market and the culture. However, the insight gained during the course of the work suggests an explicit process by which companies might improve their marketing strategy making, consisting of five stages. These stages are shown in Figure 3 and can be summarised as follows.

• The assessment of market conditions. The market conditions that are most relevant to the choice of marketing strategy making process are market complexity and market turbulence. By assessing these two variables, companies can make an informed choice of the hybrid marketing strategy making process that is most macrocongruent to their market situation.
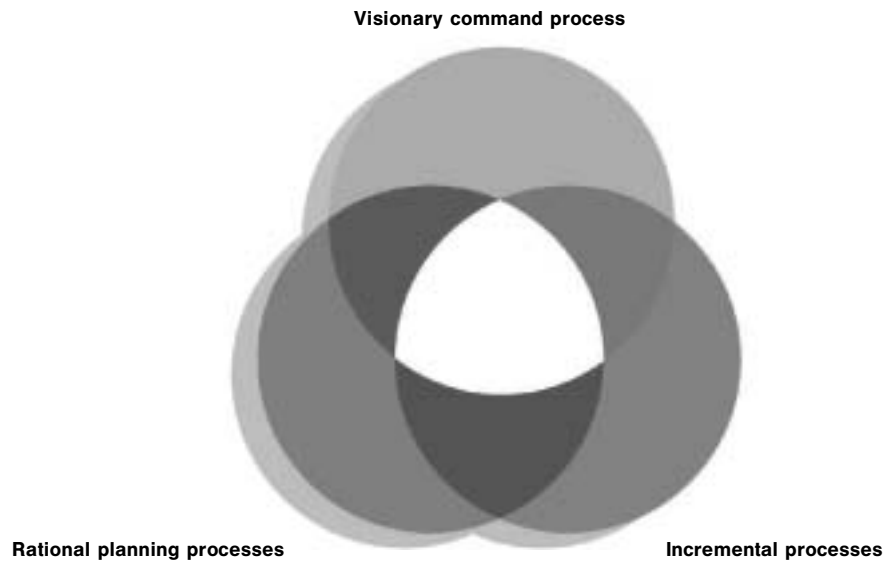
Visionary command process

Rational planning processes   **Incremental processes**

Figure 1: The three contributing processes of marketing strategy making
Source: McDonald (1996)

Macrocongruent?   Microcongruent?

YES   YES

Hybrid marketing strategy
making process
(HMSMP)

HMSMP is congruent to
both market and
organisational culture:
Strong strategy

NO   NO

Failure of HMSMP to
contend with market
turbulence and/or
complexity: Weak strategy

Failure of HMSMP due to
conflict with culture.
Artefact clash, culture
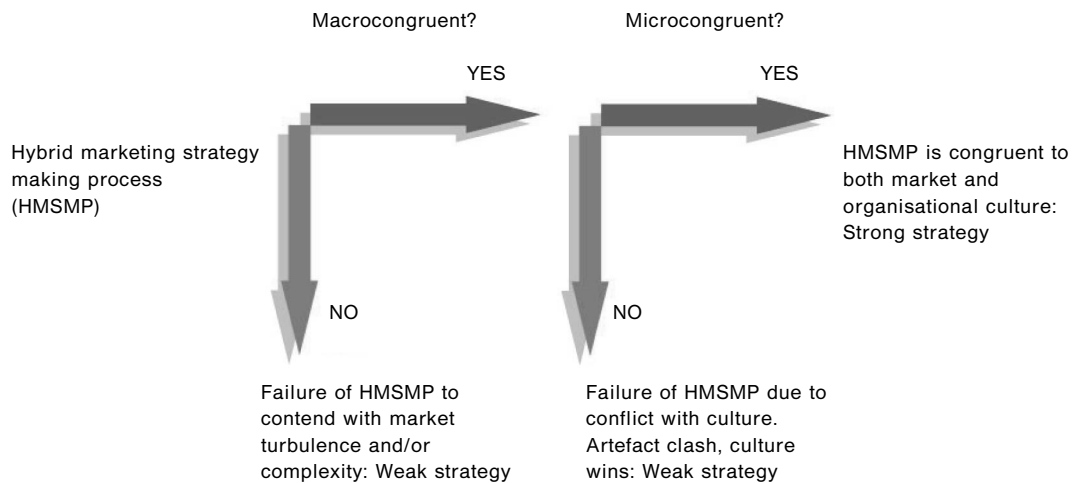wins: Weak strategy

Figure 2: Combined congruency model

- The design of a hybrid marketing strategy making process that is congruent to the external market conditions (that is, macrocongruent). Given the hybrid marketing strategy making process suggested by the assessment of the market conditions, the organisation is now able to design the sub-processes, structures and routines that constitute the detail of that process.
- The adaptation of cultural artefacts to achieve congruence between the hybrid

marketing strategy making process and the organisational culture (that is, microcongruence). With the design of the hybrid marketing strategy making process, the organisation can now achieve microcongruence by adapting those key cultural artefacts, which interact with the implementation of the process.
- The implementation of the newly bicongruent hybrid marketing strategy making process. With the achievement of hybrid marketing strategy making process
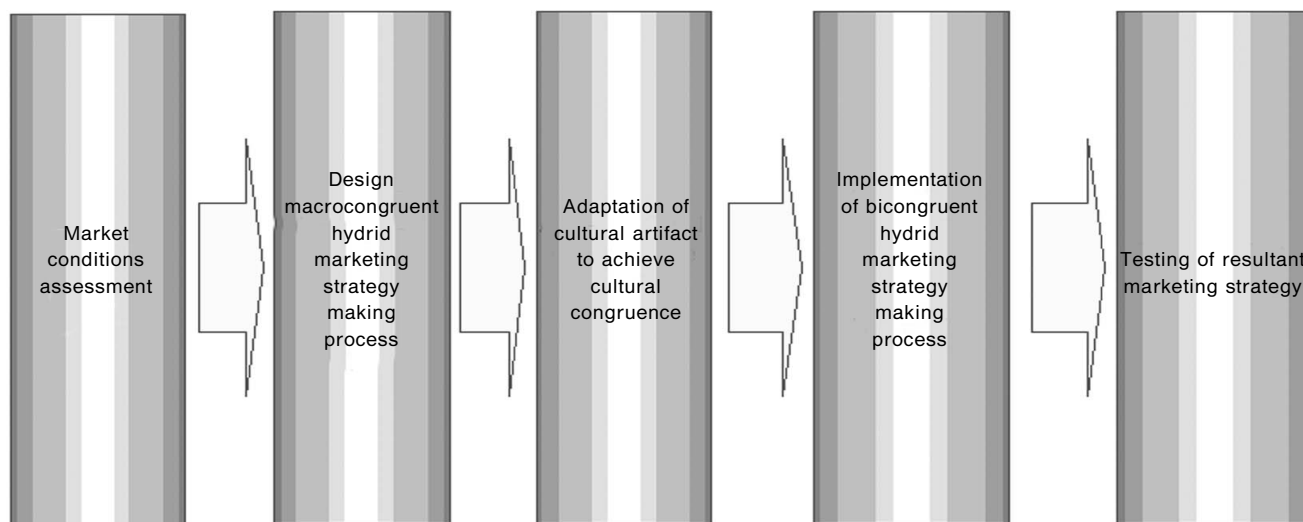
Figure 3: A five-step process for achieving a bicongruent hybrid marketing strategy making process

macrocongruence (with the market conditions) and microcongruence (with the organisational culture), the organisation can now implement the management actions that constitute the process in order to create the strategy.

- The pre-implementation testing of the marketing strategy via strategy diagnostic tests. The marketing strategy created by the bicongruent process can now be evaluated against a set of standard criteria that are independent of market context. The results of this evaluation can then be used to approve the strategy, prior to deployment, or to inform the next iteration of the process.

This approach to marketing strategy making, based as it is in the detailed observation of many companies with both effective and ineffective strategy making processes, contrasts from the traditional approach to strategising in three important ways:

- *It does not prescribe a single way of making strategy.* Many text books, business schools and consultancies suggest that there is a single method of making marketing strategy that is optimal. Typically, this is a

planning oriented approach. Whatever the recommended approach, this research suggests that the optimal strategy making process is specific to the organisation since it is contingent upon the market conditions faced by the organisation. Following the analogy suggested by Figure 1, this work would suggest that each organisation has an optimal 'colour' of marketing strategy making process, consisting of a unique blend of command, rational and incremental processes. The corollary of this is that any prescriptive process (for instance, text book planning) is likely to lead to macroincongruence and hence be sub-optimal for most organisations, unless it is adapted by the organisation.

- *It does not suggest wholesale transformation of the organisational culture.* Some workers in this field have recognised the cultural barriers to rational planning processes by advocating wide ranging change of organisational culture as a prerequisite to effective strategy making. The consensus of the empirical work in this area, however is that cultural change is both difficult and counterproductive.[42–44] As an alternative to this general approach, this work suggests that only selected cultural artefacts (those that are likely to either hinder or help the strategy making process) are considered for

adaptation, hence making the process of achieving microcongruence both more practically possible and less likely to result in unintended consequences.

- *It advocates explicit testing of the strategy that results from the strategy making process.* Most approaches to the marketing strategy process move straight from formulation to implementation with little, or perhaps only implicit testing of the strategy prior to implementation. An interesting by-product of this work (necessary to evaluate strategy process effectiveness without using measures of overall organisational effectiveness) was the strategy diagnostic tests described in the earlier papers in this series. The process of strategy making is expensive in terms of organisational resources (for instance, in research and management time), but its cost is only a fraction of that of strategy implementation, when the full resources of the company are deployed, and the consequences of a weak strategy can be threatening to the continued existence of the organisation. It is appropriate therefore that the marketing strategy that results from any process is tested prior to implementation and not, as is often the case, tested by implementation.

ACHIEVING BICONGRUENCE: PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES

As discussed above, those companies in the study that created strong strategies all exhibited bicongruence. That is, the processes they employed, while varying markedly in their use of rational, command and incremental processes, all exhibited fit with both their market environments (macrocongruence) and organisational cultures (microcongruence). The manner in which they achieved this happy state appeared to be mostly implicit, sometimes unconscious, version of the five step process for bicongruence discussed above. While the constraints of space preclude describing and elucidating those implicit processes fully, the following discussion is intended to summarise best

practice at each of the five stages.

The assessment of market conditions

Market complexity and market turbulence were the two dimensions of the market, which most heavily influenced the choice of hybrid marketing strategy making process. Hence, the assessment of market conditions can be simplified into assessing the degree of market complexity and of market turbulence. In both cases, the assessment can be made more effective by resolving the external market environment into five broad domains: the competitive environment, the customer environment and the macroenvironment (pertaining to the social, legal, economic, political and technological market context), the channel environment and the proposition. The level of complexity or turbulence of the market can therefore be considered the average or net situation across those five domains. An expansion of this concept is given in Tables 3 and 4.

A qualitative comparison of a company's market to these two tables allows a reasonable judgment, informed by this research, as to the market conditions to which the strategy making process must be macrocongruent. Note that it is typical for markets to have varying degrees of complexity and turbulence across different domains and that any assessment must use an average, weighted by domain significance, of all five domains. A more rigorous, quantified, version of this assessment tool is under development. However, this qualitative approach is sufficient to inform the next stage of the process for achieving bicongruence.

The design of a hybrid marketing strategy making process that is congruent to the external market conditions (that is, macrocongruent)

One of the major findings arising from this work was the degree to which the

Table 3: Market complexity factors

	High complexity	Medium complexity	Low complexity
Customer domain	Large number of distinct customer groups and/or complex decision-making units and processes	Several distinct customer groups or complex decision-making units and processes	One significant customer group and relatively simple decision-making units and processes
Competitor domain	Large number of significant competitors and/or indirect competitive forces	Several significant competitors or indirect competitive forces	Only one significant competitor and no significant indirect competitive forces
Macro-environment	The market is significantly influenced by a number of factors, such as political, economic, social, legal or technological factors	The market is significantly influenced by no more than two macroenvironmental factors	The market is not significantly influenced by more than one macroenvironmental factor
Channel domain	There are multiple significant channels to market	The primary channel to market is direct, with other secondary channels.	There channel to market is largely direct
Proposition	The proposition is technically complex and/or consists of an augmented proposition including service and support	The combined technical and augmented product complexity is only moderate	The proposition is technically simple and consists of only limited augmented product element

Table 4: Market turbulence

	High turbulence	Medium turbulence	Low turbulence
Customer domain	There is significant and rapid change in the nature of the customer groups and their decision-making units and processes	There is some gradual and predictable change in the nature of the customer groups and their decision-making units and processes	There is little or slow change in the nature of the customer groups and their decision-making units and processes
Competitor domain	There is significant and rapid change in the nature of significant competitors and/or indirect competitive forces	There is some gradual and predictable change in the nature of significant competitors and/or indirect competitive forces	There is little or slow change in the nature of significant competitors and/or indirect competitive forces
Macro-environment	There is significant and rapid change in the nature of the macro-environmental forces that influence the market	There is some gradual and predictable change the nature of the macro-environmental forces that influence the market	There is little or slow change in the nature of the macro-environmental forces that influence the market
Channel domain	There is significant and rapid change in the nature of the channels to market	There is some gradual and predictable change the nature of the channels to market	There is little or slow change in the nature of the channels to market
Proposition	There is significant and rapid change in the nature of core and augmented product	There is some gradual and predictable change the nature of core and augmented product	There is little or slow change in the nature of core and augmented product

three components of the hybrid marketing strategy making process accommodated different market conditions. In short, pure processes do not seem to be effective and incrementalism, in the form of experimentation and organisational learning, would seem to be necessary (at least to a small extent) in all situations. Further, market complexity is only handled well by rational processes, which

Hybrid Marketing Strategy Making Process Fit with Market Conditions

Relative Market Turbulence

A hybrid marketing strategy process that is primarily visionary command with supporting incrementalism and rational planning is appropriate

A hybrid marketing strategy process that contains significant amounts of all three components is appropriate

Any hybrid marketing strategy process will suffice

A hybrid marketing strategy process that is primarily rational planning with supporting incrementalism and visionary command is appropriate

Relative Market Complexity

Figure 4: Hybrid marketing strategy making process macrocongruence

are, in turn, hindered by market turbulence. By contrast, market complexity seems to overwhelm command processes, which seem to work best under conditions of market turbulence. This set of observations is summed up in Figure 4.

Hence the results of the market assessment, when combined with these findings, can be used to design, at least in outline, the sort of hybrid marketing strategy making process that is most macrocongruent to the organisation's market situation. Extensive examples of this can be found in original research, but illustrative examples include:

- In simple, stable markets, often occupied by established niche players in sectors that have not been significantly affected by market changes, command processes, supported by incrementalism and with a noticeable absence of formal planning, was noted. The complexity handling properties of formal planning appeared not to be needed.

- In simple, but turbulent markets, often exemplified by start-ups in technologically embryonic sectors, strong command processes appeared to cope well with the turbulence while supporting incrementalism 'filled in the gaps' left by visionary leaders. Again, lack of complexity seemed to obviate the need for formal planning.

- In complex, but stable markets, typical of mature sectors in which channels, customers and competitors had stabilised, planning was strongly associated with strong strategies. While command and incrementalism played a part, weaker strategies were often found in companies that had not been able to augment their command and incremental processes with planning.

- In the relatively rare turbulent and complex market situation, a relatively even mixture of all three processes was noted to be effective. Weaker strategies were

observed in organisations that had employed mostly planning or mostly command processes but had failed to adapt their process to fit the new market conditions.

By considering these findings, therefore, companies can broadly design their optimal strategy making process. Organisations in turbulent markets need to ensure that their senior management team both formulates and communicates the core of the strategy by identifying the target markets and the propositions aimed at them. They must further enable the incrementalism and rational planning needed to develop and implement this core strategy. Organisations in complex markets must develop their understanding and application of planning tools, without losing the flexibility implied by a degree of command and incrementalism. Organisations in complex and turbulent markets have the challenging requirement to be simultaneously competent at all three processes. Organisations in simple, stable markets have little immediate concern and should give thought to any likely increases in their market complexity or turbulence.

The adaptation of cultural artefacts to achieve congruence between the hybrid marketing strategy making process and the organisational culture (that is, microcongruence)

As discussed, the recommendations of this work differ from those of earlier work by arguing that attempts at wholesale cultural change often fail and may be harmful. Instead, this work identifies a number of cultural artefacts that were observed to hinder or help each of the three sub-processes of the hybrid marketing strategy making process. It follows that, after designing a process that is macrocongruent to the market conditions, the organisation should consider adapting the artefacts of its current culture in order to enable or at least not disable the new process. The possible enabling or hindering artefacts are, of course, innumerable. However, Table 5 shows the main outwardly visible artefacts of organisational culture observed to affect microcongruence.

Based upon the intended (and macrocongruent) hybrid marketing strategy making process therefore, and by considering the factors noted in Table 5, an organisation can deliberately and systematically adapt key artefacts of its organisational culture in order to optimise the level of microcongruence. Given a hybrid marketing strategy making process that is now, within practical limits, as bicongruent as it is possible to achieve, the next task is to implement that process.

The implementation of the newly bicongruent hybrid marketing strategy making process

The next stage in the creation of a strong marketing strategy is the implementation of the bicongruent strategy making process. Note, this is not to be confused with the implementation of the strategy itself (that set of resource deployment decisions that come out of the process). Implementation in this case is of the hybrid marketing strategy making process, designed to be macrocongruent with the market and in the context of cultural adaptations aimed at microcongruence.

Clearly, the activity needed at this stage falls into three categories. These are either commencement of new activities, cessation of former activities or continuation of current activities, depending on what the former hybrid marketing strategy making process entailed. A comprehensive actionable list of activities to start, stop or continue will therefore be specific to the organisation and will arise from comparing current activity with the activity typical of each sub-process. So, for instance, a currently command/

Table 5: Supportive and hindering cultural artefacts

Process component	Supportive cultural artefacts	Hindering cultural artefacts
Command	Clear demarcation between the roles of central and local resource allocation. Autonomy of SBUs within an agreed strategic framework. Multiple, rather than annual, linkages between central and local processes. Small, ideologically coherent top management teams. Highly quantitative management information systems. Stable top management teams and enculturation of newcomers. Close monitoring of performance indicators by functional 'Barons'. Leadership of globally homogeneous market by most advanced market. Product-led cultures and technically complex products. Leadership autocracy and Venture Capitalist pressure. Rigorous and short-term financial measurement.	Strong financial drivers combined with autocratic style reducing mutual trust. Turnover or ideologically fragmented top management team leading to confused or contradictory messages. Meddling of senior management in relatively small scale but politically high-profile decisions. Locally strong culture at variance with command culture leading to local resistance.
Planning	Prevalence of formal planning knowledge and skills. Top management team endorsement of rational approaches. Rapid increases in business complexity (eg via acquisition) allowing a basis for challenging former non-planning processes. Acceptance of the need for market research and allocation of appropriate resources. Market, rather than product, oriented IT systems. Dedication of resource to extensive internal communication processes. Appointment of new, external, managers with planning orientation. Allocation of time and resources to planning skills training or consultancy. Process driven approach within a command framework. Cross functional working between departmental silos.	Belief in primacy of product or technical knowledge or skills. Belief in primacy of hard data over soft, intangible, data. Resistance to use of formal information and control systems. Reluctance to speak out openly, often a cultural 'lag' effect from former command processes. De facto isolation of planners, either self imposed or imposed by other functions. Adherence to rigid planning processes. Weak habits of communication across functions. Fear of data costs, often a cultural lag of command cultures.
Increment-alism	HR policies designed to provide staff with skills greatly superior to nominal role. Symbolism and example to reduce blame culture. Demarcation of large and small decisions between management levels. HR policies designed to reduce turnover. Actively managed cultures, by identification and communication of core beliefs. Reduction in level of quantification required for decisions, allowance for decision makers' 'instinct'. Habits of small, incremental, proposition changes rather than discontinuous proposition changes. Development of clusters of expertise within functions. Habits of measurement and feedback on incremental changes.	Bureaucracy of decision approval. Flat structures, requiring multiple peer approval rather than approval by a limited number of superiors. Technical complexity of R&D projects, increasing lead times and costs. Interference by senior management with relatively low level changes to resource allocation. Belief in primacy of hard data, increasing the barriers to change. Requirements to justify financially incremental change to a detailed level. Close management control (eg low budget approval limits on managers). Weak communication processes across functions.

incrementalism process company seeking to achieve a more evenly balanced process (to achieve bicongruence with a complex turbulent environment) would need to commence or continue typically planning activities either to supplement or replace extant command or incremental activities.

Examples of activity typical of each of the three sub-processes are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Activities typical of each strategy making sub-process

	Rational planning	Incrementalism	Command
Basic activity	Development of basic knowledge of marketing planning tools and techniques. Systematic gathering of market data in macroenvironment, customer and competitor domains. Development of basic strategic marketing plan.	Increase in functional subsidiarity to allow localised experimentation. Establishment of basic management information system changes to measure results of incremental changes. Adaptation of market intelligence system to enable rapid response to market changes.	Development of Top Management Team consensus about organisational goals and strategies. Development of basic communication and feedback systems to transmit the command strategy to implementation level. Revision of management information system to enable Top Management Team decision making.
Advanced activity	Development of advanced techniques such as motivational segmentation, customer portfolio analysis and marketing due diligence. Restructuring of the organisation around strategy to reflect target segments and propositions. Development of advanced marketing plan integrated with other functional plans, especially R&D, Human Resources and Operations.	Establishment of formal test marketing processes. Development of advanced management information changes such as individual customer profitability. Restructuring of the organisation into self contained units with a high degree of autonomy and responsibility.	Restructuring of organisation to remove management layers rendered unnecessary by command process. Change in recruitment and retention policies to enable (and not disable) the command process. Development of higher level strategic competences among the Top Management Team.

Hence the implementation of any given hybrid marketing strategy making process is likely to involve numerous actions that were not previously undertaken by the organisation. The observations recorded in this research, however, indicated that a gradual approach to this transformation was adopted, pragmatically allowing for the difficulties and costs of dramatic changes in organisational processes. Even when partly implemented however, the resultant strategy was open to evaluation in the final stage of the process.

The pre-implementation testing of the marketing strategy via strategy diagnostic tests

The final stage of the process involves the assessment of the strength of the strategy (that is, definition of target markets and their propositions). There is, in fact, a large number of criteria that can contribute to this assessment marketing[45] but, in practice, it was found that four factors were both easily distinguishable and of obvious significance to the strength of the strategy. These were: target segment homogeneity, value proposition specificity to segment, the degree to which the strategy aligned strength to opportunities and weaknesses to threats, and strategy uniqueness compared with the competition. Although the literature records idealised properties for each of these characteristics of the strategy, our research found that the range of differentiation between best and worst cases was somewhat less. Notwithstanding, these observed differences provide a useful benchmark by which companies may evaluate their strategy and are shown in Table 7.

Hence, by comparing the marketing strategy that results from the hybrid

Table 7: A comparison of strategy properties

Strategy properties examined, in terms of idealised description from the literature	Characteristics of strong strategies found in this study	Characteristics of moderate strategies found in this study	Characteristics of weak strategies found in this study
The target market(s) is defined as groups of customers that are broadly homogeneous in their needs.	Target markets are defined by a tight product definition but with additional focusing according to behaviour and attitudes.	Target markets defined by product but systematic targeting of resource according to sales potential.	Target markets are defined by a product definition and no sub-targeting visible within that.
The value proposition(s) is tailored to the specific needs of the target(s) across the breadth of the marketing mix.	A core product proposition is clearly 'tiered' by levels of augmented product such as service and support. Alternatively, target customers allowed to 'tailor' propositions individually. Clear evidence of alliances or other means of enabling the augmented product.	Crude 'rationing' of a fairly standard service and support offer according to potential, usually carried out at sales team level.	The proposition is largely standard across the customer base, with minimal tailoring of price at sales team level.
The choice of target(s) and proposition(s) allows leverage of organisational strengths and minimisation of organisational weaknesses.	Tightly defined focus based on a combination of tangible and 'cultural' strengths, combined with de facto avoidance of less attractive segments.	'Accidental' alignment caused by de facto selection by customers in context of differentiated competitors.	Poor appreciation of relative strengths and weaknesses. Alignment only at sales level.
The choice of target(s) and proposition(s) is significantly different from that of the competition.	Similar initial targeting but with sub-targeting on different motivational criteria. Similar core product propositions but with distinctly different augmented products.	Very similar explicit targeting and propositions but improved by sales team level targeting and proposition refinement within narrow limits.	Virtually identical target description and little proposition differentiation; often driven by 'market follower' or benchmarking activity.

marketing strategy making process, the strategising company may either approve the strategy for implementation or reiterate the process informed by knowledge of the weaknesses in the definition of target market and propositions.

Taken together, therefore, this five step process represents a systematic and deliberate procedure by which medical companies can emulate the successful marketing strategy making of other companies, even when that has been achieved by implicit and unconscious procedures.

CONCLUSIONS

This work described by this paper and its two predecessors had three aims:

- to understand the quality of marketing strategy making in medical markets
- to explain the reasons for any observed weakness
- to make practical recommendations to medical marketers seeking to improve their strategy making.

Towards the first aim, this work demonstrates that marketing strategy in this sector is of very variable quality, with strong strategies being in the minority.

Towards the second aim, this work shows that strategy quality is a function of neither organisational size nor strategy making process, at least not in the simple linear relationship sense. Instead, marketing strategy quality is related to the process employed by a complex relationship

summarised in the combined congruency model.

Towards the final aim, this work substantially revises the traditional prescription to use one, usually rational planning, approach to marketing strategy making in all situations. Instead, it recommends a five step process by which companies might first develop a hybrid marketing strategy making process that is bicongruent to their own particular market and organisational culture and then, secondly, implement that process before finally testing the resultant strategy prior to implementation.

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