

# The Research Buyer's Perspective of Market Research Effectiveness

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## Abstract

This study examines the views of research buyers about the efficacy of market research used within their firms. A sample of research buyers from Australia's top 1000 companies was asked to evaluate the research outcomes of their most recent market research project in terms of their overall business strategy. Specialist market research buyers (insights managers) believed their commissioned research was very effective. This was in contrast to research buyers in generalist roles who did not believe in the effectiveness of the research outcomes to the same extent. The overarching strategic direction adopted by the buyer's firm did not make a difference to the type of research conducted ('action orientated' vs. 'knowledge enhancing'). However, entrepreneurial firms were more likely to rate their research as effective and to have dedicated research buyers generating insights into their markets. The results of this study are inconsistent with earlier studies and indicate that the market research function within Australian firms still plays an ambiguous role.

## Keywords

Market research, Performance, Research Buyer, Strategic type, Miles and Snow, Porter, Customer insights, Effectiveness

## Introduction

The views of the market research buyer have received little empirical attention, yet market research buyers act as intermediaries between external suppliers and their internal clients. They are in a unique position to assess the effectiveness of research projects in terms of both technical aspects as well as the strategic purpose to which the market research is put. Our contention is as follows: since research buyers are involved in developing and commissioning research projects to meet the strategic intent of the firm, there should be a relationship between their firm's strategy and their rating of the effectiveness of market research projects they are asked to commission. An earlier study of marketing managers (Bednall and Valos 2005) showed just such a relationship. The current study allows the internal research buyers views to be considered and aims to establish if strategic intent influences market research activities.

The earlier study by Bednall and Valos (2005) showed entrepreneurial and proactive firms placed a higher value on market research than did their more reactive counterparts. This was due to entrepreneurial firms using market research for rational marketing decision making purposes, rather than for internal political reasons. If buyers are heavily involved in strategy, it would be expected that similar linkages would be found between firm strategy and the rated effectiveness of market research.

Market research effectiveness can be judged in several ways. Slater and Narver (2000) focused on a distinction between 'action oriented' (e.g. use of research to make major decisions) vs. 'knowledge enhancing' (e.g. using research for market scanning or internal communication) roles for market research. A second way of judging effectiveness is based on whether

research fulfils a strategic rather than tactical function (Raguragavan, Lewis and Kearns 2000; Raphael and Parket 1991; Ohlsson 1993). Other criteria relate to the technical quality of the research (Bednall and Valos 2005), its usefulness in providing performance indicators (KPIs) for marketing performance (Shaw and White 1999) or its service quality attributes (e.g. Dawson, Bush and Stern 1994).

In this study, the unit of analysis for studying research effectiveness is a specific market research project. This was defined as the last market research project for which the research buyer received a "report, presentation or briefing" on behalf of their internal client. An internal client would generally be a product or marketing manager.

### **USER Scale and Market Research Motives**

Effectiveness of market research is likely to be a function of the match between strategic decision-making requirements and research project characteristics. To understand the relationship between strategy and characteristics of market research commissioned by research buyers a measure of research purpose is required. The USER scale (Menon and Wilcox 1994) reflects the five motives or five purposes firms have for acquiring market knowledge. These motives proposed by Menon and Varadarajan (1992) were:

- 1) To assist key management decisions identified prior to the research taking place;
- 2) To enable recommendations for action even though the areas for decision could not be specified in advance;
- 3) To evaluate an area against specific performance indicators;
- 4) To build a general understanding of an area, possibly leading to longer-term changes;
- 5) To build a power base for internal political reasons or to resolve competing positions.

According to Yamin and Shaw (1998), the USER measurement scale reflects two main sub-dimensions: 'action orientation' (AO) and 'knowledge enhancement' (KE). The first dimension, 'action orientation' describes projects where market research was actively used for effective decision making and change. Firms with a low action-orientation may misuse research for internal political purposes. This usage is characterised by Piercy (1983) as non-rational. In these circumstances, the research can be used to resist change and to bolster the manager's position in the firm. For entrepreneurial firms this non-rational use of research would be an anathema. Entrepreneurial firms have a critical need for information as they face ongoing major strategic choices. The USER scale contains several items which reflect this non-rational use, based on the politicised environment of the firm (Deshpandé and Zaltman 1984).

In contrast, the second USER scale dimension, 'knowledge enhancement', occurs when the firm uses research for broad market scanning, for developing an appreciation of the market or for confirming decisions already made (Bednall and Valos 2005). Baker and Mouncey (2003) talk of a 'listening organisation' which integrates the traditional role of market research with data analysis from other customer and competitor information systems, increasing their knowledge of the marketplace. For those organisations whose orientation is entrepreneurial, just listening to the marketplace is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success. Rather these firms need to act on this deep understanding of customers and marketplace. They act by creating and seizing opportunities (Bednall and Valos 2005); that is, by being proactive. For the less entrepreneurial and more reactive firms, confirmatory market research may be judged as more effective because they perceive that less critical issues are faced. Further, they believe that radically different issues are not common. In addition, these reactive firms may reject rather than

embrace surprising findings because they suggest change which may be threatening. As has been demonstrated by others, a surprising research finding may result in an unfavourable evaluation of a specific study (Deshpandé and Zaltman 1984; Armstrong 2003) for these reactive firms. On the other hand, entrepreneurial firms may view surprising or unexpected findings as opportunities to learn and adapt to a new environment.

There have been attempts to study market research effectiveness and performance. A number of studies have focused on the technical quality in terms of research design, method and implementation (Shaw and White 1999; Dawson, Bush and Stern 1994). Others have examined effective reporting practices (Bednall, Huynh and Alford 2005) and the service quality of market research suppliers to internal clients (Gombeski 1989). While these studies provide insight into the functioning of the market research process, they give little insight into why organisations differ in the types of research they conduct. The purpose of this study is to test the link between strategic orientation of the firm and the characteristics of the research buyer, research project motivation and research performance. It is contended that market research performance cannot be judged merely against technical quality but must match strategic requirements to be effective.

## Strategy and Research

To capture strategic orientation and assess if it determines the roles of the research buyer and/or the use to which market research is put the generic conceptualisations devised by Miles and Snow (1978) and Porter (1980, 1985) were used. Both typologies were included in this study since Segev (1989) showed they deal with complementary rather than duplicated strategic dimensions. These typologies classify firms or business units according to their business strategy and provide

guidelines for human resources, organisational structure and information requirements (Hagen and Amin 1995). The Miles and Snow (1978) classification, proposes three successful generic strategies each with different internal characteristics. The *Prospector* strategy achieves competitive advantage through being first into new markets with new products. In other words, it is highly entrepreneurial in orientation. It is innovative and adapts to new technology well. Such an approach would lend itself to market focused research aimed at deciding which opportunities were the most promising. Prospectors are also likely to make effective use of all types of market data available in the organisation (Bednall and Valos 2005). Since entrepreneurial firms deal with great uncertainty and organisational change, they are likely to need to distribute the information widely – both to gain acceptance of change and to sensitise the organisation to the opportunities in the external market.

In contrast, *Defender* firms achieve competitive advantage by becoming more efficient and remain in traditional markets with existing products rather than invest in new markets. These are firms that face less uncertainty compared with Prospector strategic types. Defenders would be more likely to use market research to monitor their market share and track perceived service quality. They face fewer dilemmas and fewer strategic choices than Prospectors. The third Miles and Snow generic strategy is the *Analyser* strategy. This strategy combines elements of the Prospector and Defender and is likely to have a mix of Prospector and Defender market research traits.

The complementary strategy typology of Porter (1980, 1985) has firms competing on cost leadership; product or brand differentiation; or thirdly, through focused market niche strategies. The most entrepreneurial firms within this typology are Differentiators who compete by providing either leading-edge solutions, pre-

mium quality products or uniquely branded products. *Differentiators* are likely to require good understanding of changing customer needs, resources and behaviour as they offer premium products and services. In common with the Prospectors of Miles and Snow, they are likely to be the most dedicated and reliant users of market research. On the other hand *Cost Leaders* would be reluctant to conduct research, focusing instead on internal efficiencies. They have less change to monitor and face less apparent risks. They do not need to adapt to change quickly. The final Porter type is the *Focus Strategy* which seeks a position against competitors in smaller, specific market segments. They may have little need for market research due to a high degree of customer intimacy.

The two strategies most likely to rely on marketing research appear to be the most innovative ones which are the entrepreneurial oriented Prospector and Differentiator firms. In their use of market research they are likely to have the following characteristics:

- Frequent in commissioning research
- Demanding of their market research suppliers
- Action-oriented in the application of research findings
- Demanding of their internal research buyers
- Satisfied with their research outcomes.

Given these characteristics, and the assumption that strategy shapes the allocation of internal resources, it would be expected that more entrepreneurial firms would place greater value on market research compared to more reactive firms. In this case, the more reactive firms are considered to be Miles and Snow's Defenders and Porter's Cost Leaders. For these firms, the greater value placed on market research should be reflected in the job design or task characteristics of the market research buyer role. In contrast to these organisations would

be Prospectors. For example, Olian and Rynes (1984) proposed that Prospectors would require employees who are able to deal with task ambiguity, unstructured environments and have a high tolerance for change. Olian and Rynes believed the stable and predictable environment of the Defender would not require these traits. This is because the Defender would aim for efficiency in their activities rather than innovation. In such firms, the market research function would most likely become degraded over time, since it was not required to produce action oriented or new information. Instead the acquisition of 'routine' market knowledge would become the norm. When one is evaluating the routine, functions such as market research could easily be reduced without obvious ill-effects. In these firms, there is little dynamic change to adapt to and few critical strategic choices to be made. As a result it was expected that research buying as a specialist task would occur more frequently in Miles and Snow Prospector firms. In the same way, it was felt that Porter's Differentiators would allocate more resources into the research buyer role. These firms would be more likely to have a separate role for the buying function (rather than combining buying with other tasks) and they would put emphasis on the job title using terms such as 'Consumer Insights Managers' because these position titles imply actionable outcomes to the research conducted.

## Research Hypotheses

There are a number of issues that underlie the following research hypotheses which propose that firms will differ in their market research activities according to their strategic characteristics. Firstly, more innovative strategic types such as Miles and Snow's Prospectors and Porter's Differentiator firms operate in more ambiguous and dynamic external environments. This results in greater task uncertainty and a greater need to identify and exploit market opportunities. Secondly, these innovative

firms have an 'action orientation' rather than a 'knowledge enhancement' orientation. Thirdly, these innovative firms operate in dynamic and ambiguous external environments which require them to be more demanding of their research suppliers which in turn will lead them to better exploit market research conducted.

As a result it was hypothesised that:

1. Prospector firms will be more likely than Defender firms to have dedicated market research buyers.
2. Differentiator firms will be more likely than Cost Leader firms to have dedicated market research buyers.
3. Prospector firms will have greater 'knowledge enhancing' use for market research than Defender firms.
4. Prospector firms will have greater 'action orientation' use for market research than Defender firms.
5. Differentiator firms will have greater 'knowledge enhancing' use for market research than Cost Leader firms
6. Differentiator firms will have greater 'action orientation' use for market research than Cost Leader firms.
7. Prospector firms will be more satisfied than Defender firms with market research performance as they need to better exploit market research conducted.
8. Differentiator firms will be more satisfied than Cost Leader firms with market research performance as they need to better exploit market research conducted.

## Method

The study was conducted in Australia. Based on recent estimates (ABS 2003), Australian market research expenditure comprises approximately 2% of the world total (Honomichl 2003). The research was conducted over three phases. The first phase comprised 16 in-depth interviews with senior marketers and research managers in Australia and the United States. They were interviewed about market

research performance and its value to client organisations. The second phase of the study surveyed marketing managers in major Australian firms as end-users of research.

This paper represents the third phase of the research. The unit of analysis in this phase was the principal research buyer of market research within major Australian firms. As no single sampling frame for principal research buyers could be located, two sources of respondents were used. The first source was a list of firms developed from contacting major 'for-profit firms' in industry sectors known to conduct market research. These industry sectors included banking and finance, telecommunications, food, clothing, transport, media and retail. A list of 98 principal research buyers was developed from this method. A questionnaire and a stamped return envelope were posted to each of these potential respondents. A follow-up letter was sent to the entire list three weeks later. The second source of potential respondents was developed from members of the Australian Market and Social Research Society (AMSRS). A questionnaire and reply paid envelope was posted to approximately 300 members who describe themselves as research buyers. A follow-up email, with a questionnaire in an attachment, was sent to all research buyers on the AMSRS list three weeks later. A total of 80 questionnaires were returned from both sources, which resulted in a gross response rate of 20%. The timing of the survey returns suggested that approximately 50% of questionnaires came from each sampling frame. The relatively lower response rate from AMSRS 'research buyers' may have been due to some members continuing to work in client firms, and who had left their buyer role. To assess the representativeness of the findings the market research expenditure of participating firms was aggregated. This figure was equivalent to approximately 33% of the overall Australian market research market reported by ABS (2003). While the

response rate of the study is greater than that of many business surveys (Dillman, 2000), a shorter questionnaire, use of incentives and further follow-up would have improved it.

The questionnaire contained questions that would evaluate or assess the most recent market research project conducted by the research buyer. Three sets of measures were used. The first evaluation measure was the USER scale (Menon and Wilcox 1994; Yamin and Shaw 1998; Bednall and Valos 2005) which measures 'action oriented' and 'knowledge enhancing' attributes of research. Rather than impose a structure on the data a priori, a reflective factor analysis was used. A four-factor solution using a varimax rotation was applied to the USER scale, as Yamin and Shaw (1998) had done. The second set of evaluation items were adapted from scales measuring performance of business communication (Mohr and Sohi 1995) and business service quality (Patterson, Johnson and Spreng 1997). The third and final set of market research evaluation measures were derived from the phase one in-depth interviews with buyers and users of research. These questions addressed the performance of the research in terms of the following attributes: timely, credible, useful, well-communicated information and capable of being integrated with other data.

To measure strategy, a set of multi-item scales based on both the Miles and Snow and Porter strategic dimensions were used. The Miles and Snow items were scaled from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always) and were based on twelve items measuring characteristics of the Miles and Snow strategy types (Conant, Mokwa and Varadarajan 1990). The Porter items were scaled from 1 (No emphasis at all) to 7 (Major constant emphasis) and were based on eight items measuring the Porter strategy types (Pelham and Wilson 1996). An additional three strategic items not captured in the Miles and Snow and Porter scales were derived from the in-

depth interviews. In order to improve face and content validity, minor changes in wording were made to ensure the items had contemporary meaning and were appropriate for the Australian context. Scale items were summed to make a composite score for both the a) Miles and Snow and b) Porter strategic measures. Items were reversed where wording made this necessary. The Miles and Snow composite scale was divided into thirds, with the lowest scoring group classified as Defenders, the mid-group classified as Analysers and the highest-scoring group deemed Prospectors. The Porter scale was similarly divided into three groups resulting in Cost Leader, Mixed strategy and Differentiator strategy types. Using one-way ANOVA, both the Miles and Snow and Porter typologies were used to predict the USER factor scores and the other two sets of items. Given the small sample size, a Type I error rate of 0.10 was adopted for this study. Tamhane's test for ad hoc comparisons was used throughout.

## RESULTS

### Relationship between Research Buyer Job Title and Strategy

Research buyers in the survey were asked to indicate their job title as well as describing the structure of the market research function within their firm. Respondents were classified into three groups. The first group had 'market research' in the job title, e.g. 'market research manager', the second group had a job title that indicated a knowledge specialisation that included responsibility for market research, for example General Manager – Customer Insight Analytics". The final group of research buyers were in broader management roles such as "Group Brand Manager." Clearly people in this third group had responsibilities beyond buying or using market research. Table 1 shows the frequency of buyer job title classified by the Miles and Snow strategy types.

**Table 1: Buyer job title by firm strategy**

<b>Job title</b>	<b>Defender</b>	<b>Analysers</b>	<b>Prospector</b>
Market research manager	13%	40%	48%
Knowledge manager	26%	24%	32%
Broader management	61%	36%	20%
n =	23	25	25

As expected, differences between research buyer job title and strategy type were clear (chi-square (4) = 10.23). The table shows the more entrepreneurial firms, namely Prospectors, as being the most likely to have both the 'classic' market research manager role as well as the more contemporary 'knowledge manager' role. On the other hand Defender strategy types appear to place less importance on the market research function, with making research buying part of the responsibility of more generalist managers. Surprisingly no relationship was found between the Porter strategy types and research buying. It was expected that Differentiators would be more entrepreneurial than Cost Leaders and 'mirror' the Miles and Snow findings to some degree. This finding supported Segev's (1989) contention that the Miles and Snow typology was generally more successful than the Porter typology in explaining the organisational structure and relationships between strategy and implementation. Thus there is support for the Miles and Snow related Hypothesis 1, but not the Porter related Hypothesis 2.

Other research buyer characteristics were noted. Firstly most firms (56%) had a central, specialised research buying group, with 13% of firms organising the research function within each business unit. The remaining firms used a mixture of buying structures (23%) or had the research functions organised by individual managers (8%). In terms of individual buyer characteristics, 50% were female, 60% were 35 and over, 58% had at least three years of buying experience, 65% had taken a degree unit in market research and 40% had worked for a market research supplier.

### **Relationship between USER Scale and Strategy**

To examine the hypothesized relationship between market research characteristics and strategy, respondents were asked to describe the "most recent market research study where you received a report, presentation or briefing". This would allow differences between the USER scale dimensions of 'knowledge enhancement' and 'action orientation' and either Miles and Snow and Porter strategies to be identified. A classification of 'most recent project' showed ad hoc research projects comprising 68%, on-going research projects comprising 30% (e.g. advertising tracking or customer satisfaction) with 2% of projects undisclosed. An alternative classification of 'most recent project' showed quantitative studies comprising 34%, qualitative studies comprising 33% and 22% of projects being a combination of both. Projects were classified as either *strategic* (e.g. 'strategic brand/corporate strategy') or *tactical* (e.g. 'monitor service performance'). To do this the researchers independently classified a list of market research projects and compared the results. Using independent coding there was an initial 80% agreement between the researchers as to the classifications. Classification discrepancies were resolved by jointly considering the remaining 20% of items in dispute.

The items from the USER scale of market research motivation are shown in Table 2. Each item is coded according to the scale dimensions of 'knowledge enhancing' (KE) or 'action-oriented' (AO) following Yamin and Shaw (1998). A factor analysis of the USER Scale items was conducted.

The KMO test at 0.74 was adequate for the small sample size as was the Bartlett test of sphericity. Following Yamin and Shaw (1998), a four factor solution was used. Table 2 shows the varimax rotated solution. Two of the resulting factors reflected the 'action orientation' domain with the remaining two factors reflecting the 'knowledge enhancement' role of research. The first USER factor displayed the 'classical view' that the market research project served a useful 'knowl-

edge enhancing' (KE) function by collecting insightful information as a means of 'forcing' or 'requiring' the firm to confront its marketing issues. Neither the Miles and Snow or Porter strategy typologies were significantly related to this factor. Thus hypotheses 3 and 5 were not supported. The second factor loaded mainly on the 'action oriented' (AO) role of market research. This factor was labelled the 'internal political use of market research'. Neither strategic typology was related to

**Table 2: USER scale items and factors**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	
One or more findings of the study had a significant direct impact on a decision. (AO)	0.22	-0.14	0.87	0.03	
It is possible that without the research results a different decision would have been made. (AO)	0.13	-0.10	0.79	0.23	
It was worth waiting for the research results because some of them materially influenced a decision. (AO)	0.25	-0.15	0.88	0.00	
The study was used to make a decision, which was inconsistent with at least some of the findings and conclusions. (AO)	0.08	0.52	0.22	0.28	
The results of the study were taken out of context to make a decision. (AO)	0.20	0.71	-0.11	0.06	
A decision based on the research project was hard to reconcile with the results of the project. (AO)	0.14	0.63	-0.31	-0.18	
The research was used for appearance sake. (AO)	-0.23	0.77	-0.13	-0.01	
The study was used for political purposes. (AO)	-0.13	0.78	0.02	0.10	
At least in part, the study was used as a scapegoat. (AO)	-0.16	0.80	-0.25	-0.03	
The research study was used to build awareness and commitment. (AO)	0.17	0.31	-0.18	0.36	
The study was used to validate or confirm our understanding of something. (KE)	0.17	-0.04	0.09	0.87	
The research study was used to promote awareness and appreciation for an issue of importance. (KE)	0.14	0.00	0.12	0.88	
We learned from having to clarify the problem to be addressed by the research. (KE)	0.39	0.12	0.15	0.68	
Apart from what we learned from the results, doing the study was educational. (KE)	0.75	0.09	-0.06	0.23	
We gained new insights while providing the researchers with background information on the business unit, and/or competitive situation. (KE)	0.77	0.08	0.03	0.31	
The study results were used to provide new insights. (KE)	0.74	-0.16	0.38	0.13	
The study results provided new knowledge about something. (KE)	<b>0.80</b>	-0.08	0.37	0.01	
The study results were used to learn something new about our business. (KE)	<b>0.77</b>	-0.09	0.21	0.17	
	<b>Variance</b>	<b>29.8%</b>	<b>19.6%</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>



**Table 3: Performance measures for the specific research project**

Item		Mean	s.d.
1	The research was well designed.	5.68	1.16
2	The quality of the data collected was high.	5.71	1.05
3	The data analysis was well done.	5.58	1.22
4	The information produced could be readily combined with other information we have about this area.	5.35	1.30
5	I was very satisfied with our decision to conduct this project	5.91	1.31
6	Untimely                      Timely	5.75	1.32
7	Inaccurate                      Accurate	5.80	1.13
8	Inadequate                      Adequate	5.84	1.05
9	Incomplete                      Complete	5.87	1.04
10	Not Credible                      Credible	5.91	1.13
11	Totally dissatisfied                      Totally satisfied	5.78	1.17

this factor so no support was provided to Hypotheses 4 and 6.

Factor 3 was based on action oriented items and was labelled “decision making”. This is because it relates to the effective use of market research insights in making significant decisions. The Miles and Snow strategy types were weakly related to this factor,  $F(2,68) = 2.41$ . This gave limited support to Hypothesis 4. Although Prospectors scored highest on this factor, the post hoc comparisons were not significant. The Porter strategy types were not related to factor 3 which meant Hypothesis 6 was unsupported. The fourth and final factor concerned the knowledge enhancing use or role of market research and was labelled “market commitment”. This factor was based on confirming and socialising market knowledge. Neither Miles and Snow or Porter strategy types were related to this factor, meaning Hypothesis 3 or 5 were not supported.

An examination was undertaken to assess if stronger relationships between USER factors could be found by separating the ‘most recent research project’ into strategic and tactical research projects classification. However, the findings showed no significant relationships between the Miles and Snow types and the USER factors

for either the strategic or tactical research projects. In contrast, a relationship was found between factor 3 “decision making” and the Porter typology  $F(2,26) = 4.32$  when the strategic projects were considered. Firms pursuing a Mixed strategy, being both Differentiator and Cost Leader, were far more likely than Cost Leaders to use market research for decision making. It appears that having a mixed strategic focus requires greater emphasis on market research. It is likely that the risk of being confused or in two minds in terms of strategic direction can be avoided by the use of appropriate market research. Firms undertaking a mixed strategy run a high risk of losing competitive advantage and being ‘stuck in the middle’ which is Porter’s ‘recipe for failure’.

**Relationship between Research Performance and Strategy**

Items included to evaluate performance of the market research projects are shown in Table 3. They are based on 7-point Likert and semantic differential scales.

In general most items scored approximately 6 on the 7-point scale. Ten of eleven items scored higher than the rating given by marketing managers in the previous study (Bednall and Valos 2005). Since buyers have the responsibility for selecting

suppliers and setting the parameters of the research projects, it was unsurprising that they rated performance highly. There were no differences in research buyers' performance ratings of strategic versus tactical projects.

The findings did show significant differences between the Miles and Snow strategy groups for two items. The first, "credibility of the research results", showed a significant overall difference ( $F(2,69) = 3.25$ ). Prospectors rated credibility higher than did Defenders. Possibly they have greater expertise than Defenders and are more confident at assessing credibility. The second item was "very satisfied with our decision to conduct this project." ( $F(2,69) = 2.55$ ) with Prospectors scoring higher than Analysers on this item. Possibly Prospectors' greater expertise means they can commission projects more 'tightly' at commencement and findings are more targeted to their needs. In contrast the Porter strategic types showed no differences in their research performance evaluations. Thus there was some support for Hypothesis 7, but not Hypothesis 8.

#### **Relationship between Research Performance and Research Buyer Job Title**

A number of differences in research performance assessment were found between specialist research buyers and generalist research buyers. These were:

- "research was well-designed" ( $F(2,76) = 4.81$ );
- "the quality of the data collected was high" ( $F(2,76) = 5.52$ );
- "the data analysis was well done" ( $F(2,76) = 3.45$ );
- "the information produced could be readily combined ..." ( $F(2,76) = 2.34$ ); and
- "I was very satisfied with our decision to conduct ..." ( $F(2,73) = 5.53$ )

In all cases, the generalist managers were more sceptical of the value of the project, than were both the 'consumer insights'

specialists and the 'market research manager' groups.

Two further market research performance items showed differences:

- "Untimely .... Timely" ( $F(2,73) = 2.64$ ); and
- "Inaccurate .... Accurate" ( $F(2,73) = 3.11$ ).

Generalist managers were less likely than 'market research' managers to rate the research as timely. They were also less likely than the 'consumer insights' managers to rate the market research as accurate.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Relationship between Research Buyer Job Title and Strategy**

As expected, the findings showed that research buyer job titles and job roles varied with the characteristics of the Miles and Snow strategy types. The Prospectors were more likely than Defenders to have specialised and dedicated market research managers or customer analytics manager. This is inconsistent with the Miles and Snow theory that task specialisation only occurs in well defined environments such as those faced by Defender firms. Possibly Prospectors, in striving to capture and act on market insights in changing environments, need the deepest possible understanding of research issues and methods and spend more effort in establishing this understanding. This may only be possible if they are highly skilled almost to the point of being 'narrow' specialist research buyers. In terms of the Porter strategic types no relationship was found between Differentiator and Cost Leaders and research job specialisation. This result suggests that no link appears to exist between information needed to differentiate in the market place and the job breadth of research buyers. Rather it appears that research buyer specialisation and job breadth vary by firm size and firm context rather than the Porter stra-

tegic dimensions of 'how you compete'. That is – Differentiation or Cost.

### **Relationship between USER Scale and Strategy**

Our key hypothesis was that strategy type would have a relationship with the USER roles of 'knowledge enhancement', or 'action orientation'. However, the findings showed very limited support for this hypothesis. This finding was not consistent with the Bednall and Valos (2005) study of marketing managers where Prospector types were found to be proactive in exploiting the value of market research.

To assess if this finding was related to the market research project characteristics, a separation of respondents into those deemed 'tactical' compared to those deemed 'strategic' was done. Comparisons by strategy type were then conducted. However, it was found that neither strategic typology was related to the USER factors. While this finding was not entirely surprising, it is inconsistent with the Bednall and Valos (2005) study of marketing managers which showed Prospectors as much more likely to emphasise the knowledge enhancing uses of tactical market research. This suggests that both strategic and tactical market research projects can have 'knowledge enhancing' and 'action oriented' dimensions.

### **Relationship between Market Research Performance and Strategy**

It was surprising that only one relationship was found between strategy types and market research performance. Again these findings were in contrast to the Bednall and Valos (2005) study of marketing managers where the Prospectors were more positive about the value of specific market research projects than were the other strategic types. Since the current study involved research buyers as respondents, their high positive evaluation of most projects may have produced a 'ceiling effect'. This may have

reduced the relationship between market research performance and strategy type. Nevertheless the finding that with Prospectors were more satisfied than Analysers and but not more satisfied than Defenders (as hypothesised) suggests there may be difficulties in simultaneously pursuing opposing competing strategic objectives. For example, those firms simultaneously pursuing both Prospecting and Defending strategies may find that the differing objectives of each strategy lead to differing research requirements (and therefore different expectations of the outcomes). In another example, Analysers may be less clear on what constitutes an appropriate market research agenda and may find it harder to match research with strategic needs.

### **Relationship between Market Research Performance and Research Buyer Job Title**

Compared with generalist managers, market research buying specialists were more likely to rate the quality of market research highly. This outcome was not unexpected. After all, the buying function was one of their major roles. Given that generalist managers are likely to be less technically expert as researchers, it is possible that they are in a poorer position to exploit the value of the research. It could be that the generalist manager may be less able to apply the research into a broader organisational context while the information specialist may be better able to understand and exploit the value of the information obtained. Willis and Williams (2004) have argued that insights teams, rather than internal market researchers, are better placed to deliver strategic information to their companies. In this sense they echo Valentine's (2002) call for market researchers to free themselves from the more traditional fact-centric view of market research. Valentine urges market researchers to see themselves more often as creatives, persuaders and generators of insight. Similarly Malhotra and Peterson's (2001) call for market researchers to assume a wider role. Yet it could

be argued that market research buyers gain legitimacy from their technical skills, one of which is an ability to interpret and represent the 'voice of the customer'. But perhaps the greatest contribution of market researchers might come as part of strategy development teams, where the strategy is based on market insight. In this team role they can be advocates for the research they have organised, while still having the best understanding of what the research represents and the ability act to see research outcomes properly utilised.

### Limitations and Further Research

Our results are based on a limited sample of companies in the comparatively small Australian market research market. While the current survey approach could well be extended to larger markets and more countries, extensive ethnographic studies studying strategy teams and alliances within firms may also be required to fully understand how strategic and implementation factors affect the performance and utility of market research. Issues such as the fusion of primary research with CRM and internal marketing decision support systems would be captured and may help to explain findings such as these.

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