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Marketing Specialists' Professional Activities Model as A Foundation For Training Content Design

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Abstract

The paper addresses problems of marketing education and alignment of the content and structure of professional education with the needs of labor market. Scientific and methodological basis for marketer's professional activities' mode was developed; existing Russian and foreign papers on problems of marketing education were analysed; a survey of marketing managers of local enterprises about their requirements to competences and personal characteristics of marketing specialists carried out, and as a result – a model of marketing specialist's professional activities was outlined.

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1. Introduction

One of a key priority for the Russian educational policy is to align content and structure of professional education with the needs of the labor market. Furthermore, implementation of the competence-based approach sets direction of curriculum development towards planned results. Consequently, there is an actual need for the development of professional activities' models. This applies to the professional training of marketers to the fullest extent. On one hand, there is a lack of graduates on the labor market, and on the other – marketing managers are not satisfied with the level of graduates' competency. Tatur (2004), describes competency as a practical evidence of aspiration and ability to realize one's potential (knowledge, skills, personal traits and other) for successful creative and productive activity in professional and social life, with respect to the social responsibility and continuous development.

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However, Tatur (2004) also argues that competence-based approach could cause negative effect, in case that new professional activity model neglects experience obtained through existing models in Russia. In this regard, Baidenko (2004) brings up the model of specialist's activities, outlined by Smirnova (1977), and specialist's profile development completed by Talyzina, Pechenyuk and Khikhlovsky (1987), in the system-action-based methodology. Probably, studies of Soviet academics provide foreseeing insights describing same problems and directions of change for the national higher education that are currently associated with the borrowed foreign paradigms. Thus, it is essential to address the origins and development of the notions "professional models", "job description" and "curriculum design" and observe them from the perspective of marketing education.

1.2 Designing the content of professional education

Starting from 1990s a term "designing" begin to occur oftenly both in pedagogical literature and in practical discourse. In "The great encyclopaedic dictionary" (Prokhorov, 1998) design is defined as a process of creation of the project, prototype or antecedent of supposed or possible object or state. There is an extensive discussion of designing and modeling issues of professional activities in scientific literature on theoretic and methodological level. As an example, Nechaev (1988) used principles of action-based approach as a methodological basis for the model of professional activities. (Nechaev, 1988a ; Nechaev 1988b). The model based on these principles can reflect whole of significant professional characteristics necessary for realization of key professional activities. Talyzina (1987) argues that the model of the specialist is the description of the educational aims and provides structure of the model that integrates types of activities. Within the specialist's model there is a model of activity that constitutes range of professional tasks that graduates should be able to solve. Thorough analysis of specialist's activities corresponds to the need to highlight specific characteristics of both activities and the specialist himself. (Smirnova, 1977) Generally, specialist's activity model should be based on principles that would ensure reaching of desired goals. Model must reasonable, dynamic and regularly replicable (Smirnova, 1984). Practice is perceived by number of researchers as a dynamic, multi-level hierarchical structure that is based on a specific way of thinking and disclosing personal psychological action mechanisms in the process of a given activity. In professional pedagogics, action-based approach is a methodological basis for analysis of specifics of certain occupational activity and for the development of the job description. In the Professional education dictionary (Vishnyakova, 1999) a term "job description" is defined as a document that reflects conditions, generalized substantial characteristics of specific profession and requirements (social, psychological) to the specialist – bearer of a given profession. Psychological profile is central for the job description, where psychological requirements, as well as personal and psychophysiological traits are described. Notwithstanding extensive research of the topic, there are still no papers addressing development of the marketing specialist's professional model, and specifically – addressing problems of scientific and methodological framework that are discussed in present research. A generic scheme of a system-based approach is an implementation of theory-cognitive procedure to a research of objects and their presentation, first – on the macro level (fig. 1) and then – in further detail. Apparently, that a first stage for designing professional education's content for marketing students should be an analysis of their future professional field. We have presented a macro-model (Galeeva, 2005) that, in general, describes recurring process of the marketing professional education's evolution. Refinement of the macro-model to details has to be performed while progressing from analysis of professional field to the job description that provides basis for curriculum development. The logic behind detailed model is shown on fig.2. As mentioned above, one of the key priorities in Russian educational policy is to align education with the needs of labor market. Therefore, prior to discussion of the problems of curriculum design, we have to emphasize professional field where the competence-based professional education development takes place.

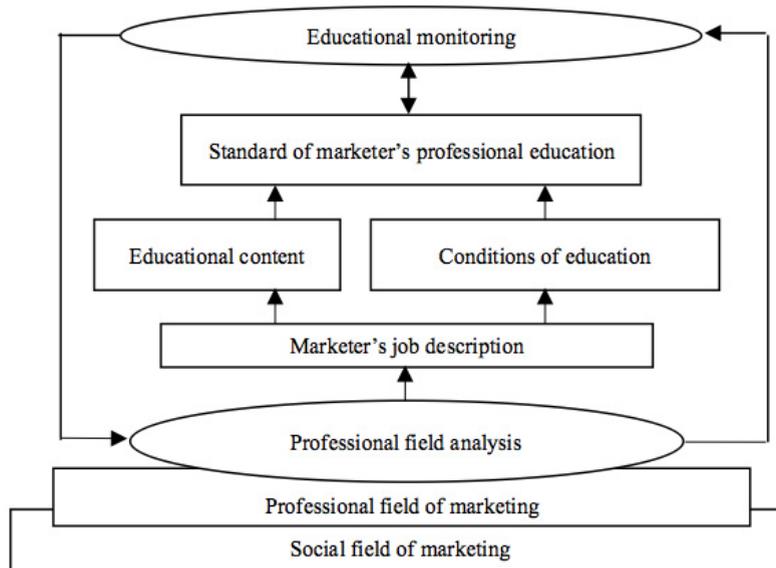


Fig. 1. Macro-model of the context of marketing professional education's evolution

A priori, there is a set of general requirements for marketer's job description that is derived from the professional field: general perceptions for the structure and volume of needed knowledge, skills and abilities built up by the previous experience. However, according to the aims of our research, we have to emphasize professional field of marketing not only as a named professional field, but to observe it in a wider social and economic context of the region. Subsequently, two-component analysis of the professional field takes place. A goal is to create the two-piece knowledge base, consisting of results of analysis of contents (pos. 2 fig. 2) and activities (pos.3 fig.2) of professional field accordingly. There are two possible exits from the content analysis procedure. First (path 1=>2), scientific knowledge acquired from substantial aspects of professional activities is forming a cognitive component of the knowledge base (pos.4 fig.2). However, digestion of scientific knowledge cannot be separated from specific psychological patterns. Therefore, second exit (path 2=>8) from content analysis is to form psychological requirements that are determined by essential aspects of professional activity in the marketing field. To sum up, we can say that the content analysis is answering following questions: what marketer has to know, where is this knowledge contained, and how this knowledge can be transformed from scientific to educational. The procedure of analysis of activities (path 1=>3) also has two exits. First (path 3=>8), is a cognitive part of the marketer's job description that is determined by behavioral knowledge. Second (path 3=>5) – is determination of conditions, forming behavioral component of professional competency of the specialist, and therefore creating a field for psychological and pedagogical regulation of educational process. As a result, analysis of activities that is forming behavioral component of the knowledge base (pos.5 fig.2) answers two questions: what constitutes marketer's professional mentality and what are the educational conditions to form this type of mentality. Apparently, there is a problem of transforming behavioral component of the knowledge base to educational constructs. Summation of professional scientific knowledge (path 2=>4=>8) and behavioral knowledge (path 3=>8) forms a model of professional activity (pos.6 fig.2). Summation of behavioral requirements (path 2=>8) and requirements for the procedural aspects of activities (path 3=>5=>8) forms a specialist's model.

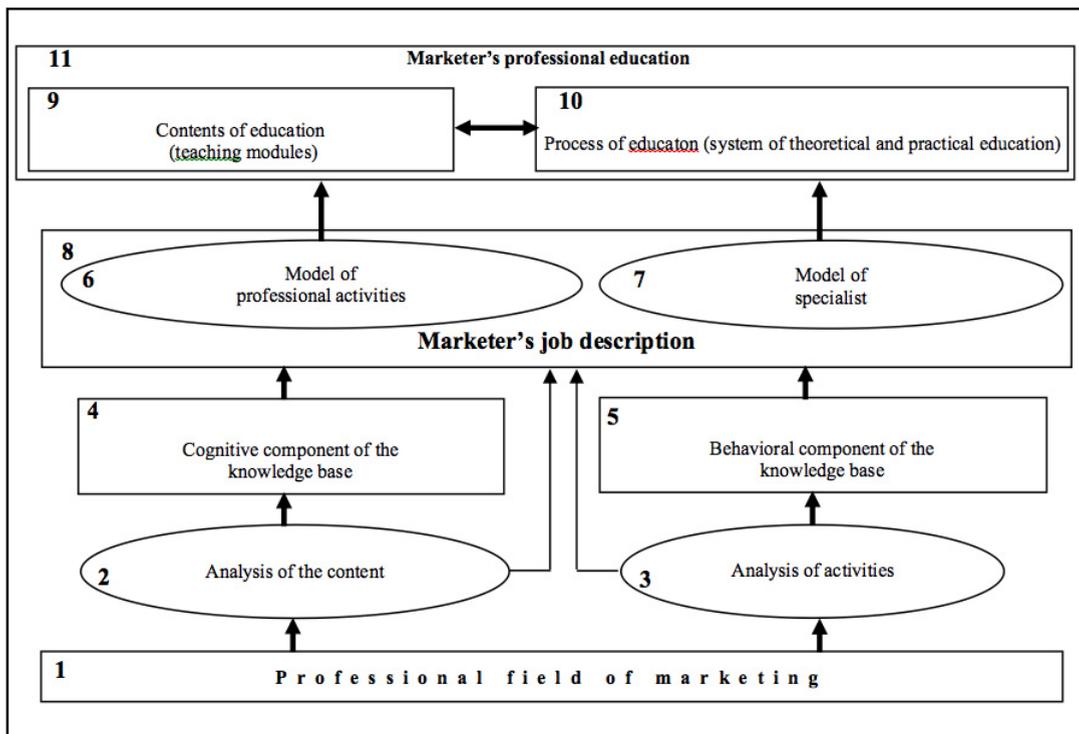


Fig. 2. Detailed model of the context of marketing professional education's evolution

Integration of both models is based on common psychological characteristics, determined during analysis of content and activities of professional field of marketing. Marketer's job description is a result of such integration (pos.8 fig.2). In its turn, job description is a basis for determination of the curriculum content in form of structured set of modules (pos. 9 fig. 2) and conditions for formation of educational process (pos. 10 fig. 2). It is very important to bear in mind following limitation – we can distinguish paths of analysis of content and activities in macro-procedure only on theoretical level. In real life, design of the model's components is a simultaneous procedure. Each educational construct created consist both of cognitive and behavioral parts of the job description.

1.2 Analysis of professional field of marketing

Nowadays marketing is defined as a concept of entrepreneurial activity in a competitive environment, basing on satisfaction of customers' needs. The need to use marketing as a philosophy that pervades all activities of a company has transformed perception of marketing from a managerial concept to so called holistic marketing. In this case, customers, a company and its partners take a part in company's marketing (Golubkov, 2004). Modern reality stipulates emergence and fast development of relationship marketing, where the key is to build mutually beneficial long-term relationships between stakeholders: customers, suppliers, wholesalers and retailers. Modern perception of business is that any company is a part of external environment and is chained with others to form customer's value. Consequently, client-supplier relations transform from predominantly two-way to network relations of multitude of supplier to multitude of consumers (Moiseeva & Sterligova 2009). In network theory, the main emphasis is made on forming partnerships between business entities, emerging in the process of creation and transition of value to a client. System of values realized in a product is a key component and defines characteristics of relationships between entities within the network (Rudenko, 2010)

According to Kotler (2000) a network organisation is a coalition of interconnected specialized economic entities

pursuing their own goals (independent firms or autonomous organisations), acting without hierarchical control, but involved in the system with common goals through multiple horizontal links, interdependence and exchange. Multi-level organizations are defined by multiple horizontal and vertical links within and between levels, and between levels and external environment. Main goal is to create self-controlled balance within organization through transparency and division of responsibilities. Kotler (2000) highlights key functions of marketing in network organizations: *Marketing as an internal information base*. Companies understand that customers' information is an asset. In network organizations marketing departments could be internal depositories of information and they have to find ways to persuade customers to value their membership in the company's information base. *Marketing as internal educational factor*. One of key functions of department of marketing is to provide training and better educational level of staff. It is vital to inform personnel about latest advancements in marketing theory and practice, information databases and decision making models. *Marketing as integration factor*. Concept of distributed exchange in networks is based on extensive horizontal links, transparency and accountability on the bottom level. Taking into consideration wide information role and educational factor, marketing must perform integrating function for the whole network. Marketing department could become a strategic basis of organization. It is vital to understand that marketing is a process of creation value for the customer. Therefore, the increase of the role of marketing has to be based on the whole set of diverse economic and managerial tools that is gathered by academia and practitioners. Formation of the marketing in the Republic of Tatarstan (Russian Federation) began on the basis of the international best practices. According to the research that was performed in 1999 (Khisamutdinov 1999), history of marketing in companies has following timeline: Starting from the economic reforms in 1991, most of marketing departments and divisions were established in 1993-94 (21%) and 1995-98 (68,6%). In 2006, as a part of research programme of Republican centre of marketing, we have undertaken the research of marketing maturity in enterprises of Tatarstan. Second wave of this research was undertaken in 2010 and in 2013-2014 we are performing research of interaction between marketing education and labour market. Our research objects in 2010 were 51 companies, where 54,9% were service companies and 45,1% were industrial companies accordingly. The method was an expert survey. Experts were executives, marketing managers and specialists. According to our findings, marketing communication function (advertising, PR, exhibition, direct sales and promotion) is more developed than any other functions of marketing in Tatarstan – with the average score of 3,21. Second place experts gave to sales function (distribution channels development and optimization, retail network development, sales) – average score – 2,77. Analytical function of marketing was only on third place (consumer research, competitive analysis, demand-supply research, etc) – 2,09. Function of marketing planning and control is less developed according to experts – average score 1,92. Next question block was concerned with activities of marketing departments in studied enterprises. Most common specialists in marketing departments are advertisement and promotion specialists – they were mentioned in 83,7% of answers; market researchers – 67,4%; commodities/merchandise specialists – 34,9%; pricing specialists – 30,2%. It is assumed that these four profiles are the most requested in companies of Tatarstan. Comparison of these results with findings of a research that was carried in 2006 shows that the first place was given to market research specialists and promotion specialists were on the second. There were much less pricing specialists than merchandise specialists. It can be explained by consequences of economic crisis when the number of researchers was cut and importance of pricing policy increased. Regarding level of education of marketing specialists, there are people with various level of qualification. 30,9% - specialists with higher marketing education (specialist level); 25,6% - specialists with higher education in economics and management (specialist level); 39,5% - specialists with other higher education (specialist level); 3% - masters of disciplines mentioned above and 1% - employees with vocational secondary education. Comparing to 2006, when 47,3% of enterprises had no employees with marketing education in marketing departments, situation looks optimistic, however, there is still sufficient potential for placement of marketing graduates. For question "What are the main functions of marketing department in your company?", 82% of experts responded market research, 80% - advertisement, 66% - sales promotion, 56% - sales strategy development, 48% - product range planning, 40% - product sales. Comparing to 2006, it can be noted that companies now emphasize effectiveness of advertising campaigns, then it was least important and it was mentioned only by 5% of experts. Desk research that we performed in November, 2013 allows us to estimate most in-demand profiles of marketers. Most requested are general profile marketers – 52% of job vacancies, then marketing analysts – 13% and internet-marketers (including social media marketing specialists) – 11%, determined by effectiveness and

expansion of abilities of this tool lately.

To sum up our findings, we can state:

1. Marketing as a socio-economic phenomenon is required in Tatarstan, and nowadays is on institutionalizing stage that is defined by following characteristics:
 - a. Marketing departments attained sufficient autonomy in their activities in companies of different forms. However, it is too early to say that they have reached maturity.
 - b. Size, incorporation and proprietary form and industry type define difference in configuration of marketing departments and their specialization.
 - c. Due to the change in economic environment, both in traditional and modern methods of marketing activities improve and evolve. Private and service companies are on the edge of this process.
 - d. Specific marketing activities are carried without sufficient intensity, for example, advertising is a weak point in service companies, and the demand is not adequately researched in state companies.
 - e. There is significant potential for development of all aspects of marketing activities. Marketers are not using market research systematically.
 - f. Role of marketing department as a leading division of organization is increasing, dependence between results of company and effective work of marketing department tightens.
2. The issue of professional education of marketers has distinctive relevance. According to our findings, only one third of employees in marketing departments have degree in marketing. Surveys of executives and marketing managers show serious lack of knowledge in economics, sociology, law, psychology and information technology.

1.3 The model of professional activities and directions of rethinking of marketers' professional education content

Exercising of marketing requires not only fundamental training, but extensive knowledge in areas of production management and economics, trade, civil and administrative law, finance, sociology, psychology, mathematical methods of economics, advertising and other disciplines of general and specific nature. (Kochurova 1993). It is appropriate to quote Damary (1994), who is stating that it is important to possess a gift for organizing successful advertising campaigns, but it is no less important to calculate and explain influence of this campaign on company's revenue. Necessity of critical reflection on marketing curriculum is stated in many foreign research papers. Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens (2002) argues that the current emphases in the marketing curriculum do not meet the needs of marketing managers. First, marketing education is narrowly focused on decision making of managers and exclude wider moral, political and social contexts, resulting in managerial orientation of marketing. Second, as was mentioned by Grey (1996) management education provides instrumental view of knowledge whereby the educators' task is to present tools and techniques that equip managers with useful knowledge. This approach is described as technocratic due to its preoccupation with technical skills and competencies. A technocratic and managerial approach does not reflect two key aspects of marketing activities. First, managerial orientation is ignoring political, social and moral perspectives that surround marketing activities. Second, a technocratic focus that emphasize the "what" and "how to" of marketing management fails to meet the needs of marketers that are working in complex and uncertain world of marketing practice. Marketers more than any other business professionals are expected to make sense of and interpret the world outside of the organization (understanding customers, monitoring the environment). These conditions require new emphases in marketing curriculum, basing on critical reflection of underlying assumptions, practice and concepts of marketing (Catterall, Maclaran & Stevens 2002). The practice of marketing education should keep up with advancements in theories and models of marketing. In early ninetieth many US institutions have been criticized for a gap between theory and practice of marketing. As a result, the MBA programme for relationship marketing was developed (Cannon & Sheth 1994). Healy et al (2001) proposed to implement this approach on every level of marketing bachelor degree. National standard of marketing education (Marketing Education Resource Center 2005), adopted in US in 2005 provides an example how trends discussed in this paper can be taken into consideration. As stated, the driving force in designing curriculum content was the needs of the industry. They provided insights that textbooks or educators without practical experience could not provide.

That is the reason why the curriculum consists of modern courses that should reduce corporate training of graduates after placement.

Adam J. Koch (1997) also states in view of the continuing, comprehensive transformation of the global business environment, the marketing curriculum is in need of a general overhaul. He proposes a comprehensive curriculum transformation, on the basis of critical reflections of the following aspects:

- the existing curriculum is based on textbooks rather than on the problem-orientated approach;
- the static format imposed by the 4Ps principles;
- curricular differences resulting from insufficient consultation with marketing professionals;
- content that lags behind leading marketing practice;
- insufficient internationalization of the curriculum which is addressing American experience and thinking;
- failure to develop certain skills in marketing graduates, such as leadership and teamwork skills.

For several years, researches continue to indicate a gap between the marketing practice and the marketing education, lag of the marketing courses from requirements of professional field and insufficient level of graduates' skills required from XXI-century marketers. (Finch, Nadeau & O'Reilly 2013; Gibson-Sweet et al 2010, Harrigan&Hulbert 2011; Helgesen, Nettet & Voldsund 2009). Issues of quality of marketing education and accordance to the needs of labor market have brought big attention in Russia as well. Particularly, since 1990s, Russian economic academy named after Plekhanov performs research of specific requirements for marketing graduates. (Skorobogatykh 1994; Skorobogatykh 2004; Soloviev 1996). According to employers, marketing graduates have following drawbacks: lack of basic marketing knowledge, failure to apply theoretical knowledge to practice, failure to communicate effectively with people, failure to prepare reports, analytical materials, inability to present themselves and to make presentations (Skorobogatykh ,2004). In the scope of our research, we have observed employers' requirements to marketing graduates'. Experts were asked to score according to 10 points grading scale graduates' professional qualities. Distribution of qualities according to the average score is present in table 1. Also, experts were asked to score the most important marketing tasks, results are provided in table 1.

Table 1. Results of expert survey

The most important marketing tasks	Score	The most important professional qualities	Score
Determination of customers' needs	6,14	Interpersonal skills	8,04
Market data mining and analysis	5,50	Accountability	7,55
Product competitiveness evaluation	3,82	Analytical thinking	7,43
Pricing and price promotion	3,74	Persuasion skills	7,35
Sales promotion	3,41	Continual improvement	7,04
Market volume and share evaluation	3,28	Teamwork	6,84
New product development	3,20	Thinking out of box	6,73
Company's image development	3,16	Strong intuition	6,57
Advertising campaigns' development	3,08	Presentable appearance	6,16
Market segmentation	3,07	Trait for innovations	6,02

As it can be seen from the results above, a broad range of various requirements (special, economic, cultural, etc) are applied to a marketing graduate. Among the most important are accountability, interpersonal skills, strong intuition, ability to think out of box and analytical thinking. This correlates to the list of the most important marketing tasks, with determination of customers' needs as well as data mining and analysis that provides a basis for product competitiveness evaluation. It is necessary to state that a high level of customers' awareness defines change in the requirements to a marketing graduate, particularly to information competency. Therefore, the training of marketers in the information society should have systematic approach, and design of the professional model should begin with the analysis of professional field, macro-modelling and determining of the main algorithms of marketer's professional activities. We define (Galeeva, 2008) the generalized algorithm of marketer's professional activities consisting of rigorously determined sequence of stages as following:

Approaching to any marketing task, and bearing in mind a specific aim, marketer starts with analysis of a company’s external environment. As a result of the first stage, analytical information regarding external environment is gathered. The second stage is to research internal environment of the company, in order to collect information about existing and desired state and structure of company, and what changes have to be done. The third stage is to implement marketing solutions, prepared on the previous stage and effective translation of these solutions to the market. One of the key results of implementation of the algorithm is creation of the knowledge base, containing marketing activity effectiveness monitoring system as a mandatory element. It allows recurring of the algorithm when needed, starting from wider research of company’s external environment. Generalized algorithms are used for the job description development and consequently, for curriculum development. Professional activities’ model is the most important part of this process, because main didactic and psychological parameters are defined on the modeling stage. For didactic parameters of the marketing curriculum we define basic cognitive parts of the knowledge base: what knowledge graduate have to digest, and consequently what he has to know after theoretical part of educational process. Apparently, these cognitive parts and knowledge depends on profile of professional education. Furthermore, differentiation of cognitive parts is multidimensional. There are several vectors for differentiation: *type of marketing* (producer’s marketing, consumer’s marketing, state marketing, place marketing, etc), *form of marketing activity’s organization, aims of marketing activity*. It is very important to take into consideration action psychology of a marketer in the curriculum design. Kochkina (1987) defines three types of mental tasks solved by a human being during professional activity: *stereotypic, diagnostic and heuristic*. *Stereotypic* tasks are tried solution patterns and carried out automatically (skills level). *Diagnostic* tasks require a choice of optimum out of many existing solutions (level of formal logic). *Heuristic* tasks require creative approach, because they are related with creation of the new systems and objects. Stereotypic tasks may be defined as having rigid algorithm, diagnostic as having algorithm but requiring analysis and correction; heuristic — as tasks without algorithm. In real life, mental activity is carried out simultaneously on each of three levels: some work is carried out automatically (on the skills level), some requires to choose from alternatives (level of formal logic) and some – requires a search of new solutions (heuristic level). Higher education is oriented predominantly on the heuristic level; however, it goes without saying that professional handling of skills and techniques of the first two levels is mandatory for the graduates. According to mentioned above, the hierarchy of three psychological levels of marketer’s professional activities can be drawn:

- operational level (performing tasks according to existing algorithm)
- analytical level (generalization, trend determination, etc)
- productive level (creation of new marketing solutions)

The structure of the marketer’s professional model is given as an example in the table 2.

Therefore, the analysis of prospects for the development of marketing on one hand, and the evaluation of restructuring of economic and educational areas on the other hand, show that key professional qualities of marketer are: polymath of humanitarian, socio-economic and general professional training; adequate level of simultaneous systematic thinking; professional handling of system analysis; interracial and interreligious tolerance; high levels of information competence; understanding relationship marketing, and network economics; ability to make marketing decisions in ambiguous environment, that must be based on critical reflection of underlying assumptions, practice and concepts of marketing.

Table 2. Model of marketer’s professional activities.

Types of professional activities (cognitive component)	Psychological characteristic of activity
1	2
Internal professional field (company, organization)	
1. External environment research:	
1.1. Market research: determination of trends in demand-supply situation; market segmentation; choice of the most effective competitive strategy.	Operational — performing marketing patterns (<i>skills level</i>).
1.2. Consumer research: determination of factors and trends in consumers’ demand; process and conditions analysis for meeting basic customers’ needs; segmentation of	Analytical — choosing and optimizing combinations (<i>level of formal logic</i>).

consumers' market.	Analytical — market research (<i>level of formal logic</i>).
1.3. Competitive research: strength and weaknesses; market share distribution, consumer response to competitors' strategies; choice of own competitive strategy.	Productive — decision making in ambiguous environment (<i>heuristic level</i>).
1.4. Research of logistics.	
2. Internal environment research, competitive level determination through comparison of internal and external factors:	
2.1. Research of commodity and price: determination of appropriate ratios "expenses/prices" (internal conditions) and "price/profit" (external conditions).	Operational/analytical
2.2. Promotion evaluation: advertisement effectiveness, sales promotion, PR policy.	Operational/analytical
2.3. Optimal organization structure development.	Operational/analytical
2.4. Consumers' behavior model design, response model design.	Analytical/productive
2.5. Development of marketing information system (knowledge base). Problematic decision making	Analytical/productive
3. Forecasting, designing and decision making in integration processes:	
3.1. Global market analysis for prospective cooperation.	Analytical
3.2. Analysis of possibilities of transformation of competition to cooperation.	Analytical
3.3. Design of internal market network. Principles, strategies and tactics.	Productive
3.4. Data mining, monitoring of changes analysis and design of internal market network. Creation of knowledge base.	Analytical/productive
3.5. Planning of corporate educational activities.	Analytical/productive
Local professional field: regional marketing service	
1. Socio-economic analysis of the region, prerequisites for vertical, cross-market and consumers networks.	Analytical/productive
2. Determination of strategy of integration within vertical networks of the region.	Productive
3. Vertical network efficacy evaluation, profitability of regional venture projects.	Analytical
4. Determination of strategy of integration in cross-market networks.	Productive
5. Technological forecast, market structure monitoring, cooperation of technologically adjacent firms, standardization.	Analytical/productive
6. Financial markets integration, investment potential analysis	Analytical/productive
7. Forecasting, designing and realization of consumer's networks	Productive
8. Consumers' networks and communities regulation based on transparency, self-regulation and interaction of all members.	Analytical/productive

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