

*Antecedents and consequences of the conflict between
the Marketing and Sales departments*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the relationship between the Marketing and Sales departments. A model which investigates the antecedents of the Marketing-Sales departments' conflict in terms of market orientation and company's strategy, as well as the consequences of this conflict in terms of company performance was developed and tested. Based on data collected from both Marketing and Sales managers of 132 companies, the study indicates that market orientation and the consistency in the perceptions of Marketing-Sales managers vis-à-vis the company's strategy are reducing the conflict between Marketing and Sales departments, which unfortunately is hurting company performance. The implications of the study are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Marketing-Sales conflict, Market orientation, Company's strategy, Company Performance

Appropriate Group: Competitive Papers

1. Introduction

A considerable body of research calls for both Marketing and Sales (hereinafter M&S) departments to modify their role and practices in order to increase their coordination and give life to integrated processes (e.g. Cespedes, 1993; Day, 1994; Slater and Narver, 1995, Shapiro, 2002; Kotler et al., 2006). Integration between M&S departments is achieved when these two functions are (a) supportive of each other, (b) consistent and congruent, and (c) sharing the same culture (Meldrum, 1996; Rouzies et al., 2005; Kotler et al., 2006). Griffin and Hauser (1996) cite cultural differences between M&S, which are mainly created by differences in background, as a barrier to inter-functional integration between these two departments. In a similar vein, Rouzies et al. (2005) suggested that organizational cultures with norms of sharing and adapting positively affect the degree of M&S integration. Two significant elements of culture which had been mentioned in the literature as having a bearing on the relationship between M&S departments are (a) the degree of market orientation, and (b) the company's strategy (Meldrum, 1996; Homburg and Pflesser 2000; Guenzi and Troilo, 2006). Moreover, the relationship between M&S is reported as being problematic (Dewsnap and Jobber, 2000, 2002) and having a positive impact on company performance (Shapiro, 2002; Kotler et al., 2006; Meunier-FitzHugh and Percy, 2007).

Despite the above observations, almost no attention has been devoted to investigating (a) the antecedents of M&S conflict in terms of the two significant elements of culture (market orientation and company's strategy), and (b) the consequences of this conflict in terms of company's performance. Moreover, extant literature in the area of interdepartmental relationships, and more specifically between the M&S departments, has not examined, as yet, the perceptions of the M&S managers

of the same company simultaneously. As Dawes and Massey (2005) point out, researchers, ideally, need to examine M&S managers' perspectives simultaneously.

Therefore, the main objectives of this research project were to capture the perceptions of both M&S managers within the same company in order to investigate (a) the impact of market orientation and company's strategy on the level of conflict between M&S, and (b) the effects of this conflict on company performance.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1 Market Orientation

Market orientation has been studied extensively over the past twenty years with the general consensus that is positively related to business performance (e.g., Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990). A central aspect of the market orientation is cross-functional interaction (Krohmer et al., 2002). Specifically, Narver and Slater (1990) view "inter-functional coordination" as being one of three components of market orientation, whereas Jaworski and Kohli (1993) place emphasis on behaviours in regard to market information and cross-functional activities, which fall within the intelligence dissemination part of their conceptualization. In general, market oriented companies are characterized by a high level of integration of market-related knowledge and skills (Guenzi and Troilo, 2006). Prior research shows that knowledge and skills regarding market-related activities are highly concentrated in M&S departments, which are the two departments traditionally responsible for managing market relationships (Homburg et al., 1999; Krohmer, et al., 2002; Rouziès et al., 2005). Additionally, Guenzi and Troilo (2006) suggested market orientation as a cultural aspect which improves M&S integration, while Jaworski and Kohli (1993) found that higher level of

conflict was associated with reduced market orientation. Thus, we can hypothesize that:

H1: Market orientation is (a) decreasing the level of conflict between Marketing and Sales departments, and (b) enhancing company performance

2.2 Company's Strategy

Companies can employ different strategies in order to create superior customer value (e.g. Day, 1994), which is the basis of their competitive advantage (Guenzi and Troilo, 2007). The M&S relationship is highly connected with the quality of strategy formulation and implementation (Menon et al., 1996). Conflict between M&S is associated with lower co-operation and the co-ordination of strategy activities, effectively undermining the quality of strategy in terms of both planning and implementation (Menon et al., 1997; Ruekert and Walker, 1987). There is also seems to be a connection between M&S alignment and inconsistencies in the perceptions of M&S managers regarding company's strategy (e.g. Viswanathan & Olson, 1992). For instance, Strahle et al. (1996) demonstrated inconsistencies on strategy formulation between M&S departments, suggesting that in most instances the activities performed at the Sales department level do not reflect the strategy at the SBU level. Likewise, Colletti and Chonko (1997) showed that changes in marketing strategies do not drive to consistent modifications of sales strategies and tactics, while Evans and Schlacter (1985) found that companies hardly integrate the sales force in marketing planning processes. Thus, we can hypothesize that:

H2: Inconsistencies in the perceptions of Marketing and Sales managers regarding their company's strategy are (a) enhancing the level of conflict between their departments, and (b) reducing company performance

2.3 The impact of conflict on company performance

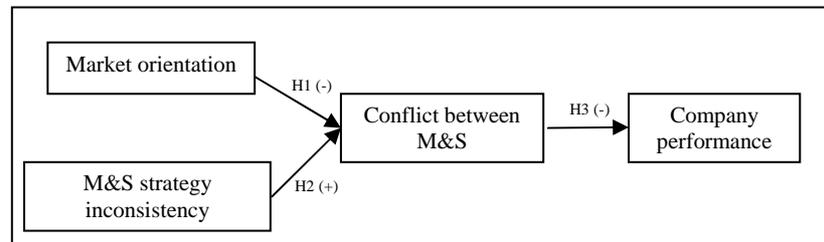
Some scholars have devoted attention to M&S interaction. For instance, Dewsnap and Jobber (2000, 2002) note that the M&S relationship is characterized, mainly, by negative outcomes, e.g. a lack of cohesion, distrust, dissatisfaction, and conflict. Conflict has been defined in the organisational science literature as the “collision of actors” (Katz and Kahn, 1978) and “tension between two or more social entities – individuals, groups or larger organisations - which arises from incompatibility of actual or desired responses” (Gaski, 1984). In the marketing literature, Menon et al. (1996) conceptualize conflict as dysfunctional, task-based tension between departments, which manifests in the form of “turf battles” and “destructive self-serving efforts” which are both counter to collaboration (Morgan and Piercy, 1998). The consequences of conflict on organisational processes and marketing performance are characterized as deleterious (Chimhanzi, 2004). Conflict has been found to reduce inter-functional performance (Dutton and Walton, 1996; Souder, 1981; Weinrauch and Anderson, 1982) as it results in the absence of depth of communication and infrequency of contact between functional units (Menon et al., 1997). Additionally, Kotler et al. (2006) emphasized the need for ending the war between M&S in order to create superior company performance. Thus, we can hypothesize that:

H3: Conflict between Marketing and Sales departments has a negative impact on company performance

2.4 Research Model

On the basis of the preceding discussion, the relationships between the constructs used are summarized in the research model shown in fig.1.

fig.1 research model



3. Research methodology

3.1 Sample & data collection

Consumer goods companies with turnover of more than 5 million euro and more than 50 employees were specified as the population of this study, since these criteria can justify the existence of an independent Marketing department. Using the TNS ICAP Census of Greek Companies Financial Position, 509 firms were identified as fulfilling the above criteria. From these companies, a stratified sample of 312 companies was selected (strata were derived on the basis of size and SIC code) and contacts were made by letters and phone calls asking their cooperation in our research. 132 of them agreed to participate in our research (42% response rate). Personal interviews were conducted, using a structured questionnaire, with the M&S managers of these companies. Both M&S managers answered the same questionnaire in separate personal interviews (without knowing each other's answers). This method apparently is the most appropriate one since it reduces common method bias, as from each sample company two key-informants provided the data (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

3.2 Operationalisation of study variables

Market Orientation: The fifteen-item scale developed by Narver and Slater (1990, 2000) was adopted in order to capture the level of market orientation. Both managers indicated, using a 5-point Likert type scale (where 1 stands for low level of market orientation and 5 stands for high level of market orientation), their degree of agreement with each of the items of the scale. Two CFAs (one for each manager) were conducted in order to assess the reliability and validity of this reflective measure. Also, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, the CFAs provide evidence in favor of the three Narver and Slater's (1990, 2000) market orientation components (*Customer Orientation, Competitive Orientation, Inter-Functional Coordination*) as shown in Tables 1 and 2. Following standard procedures (see Narver and Slater 1990, 2000) the mean value of these three components for both M&S managers was computed providing their perception of market orientation. Independent samples t-test indicated no significant differences in the opinions of M&S managers regarding the level of market orientation (*Marketing managers mean=4.06 / Sales managers mean=3.97 / t=1.377 / ns-sig=0.491*). Thus, the mean value of the responses from the two managers of each company was computed and used as a composite measure of market orientation (*mean value=4.01, Std.dev.= 0.52*).

variable		CFI	TLI	RMSEA	AVE	mean	Std.dev	Cronbach's Alpha
Market orientation	Marketing Manager perceptions	.922	.913	.072	See Table2	4.0	.54	See Table2
	Sales Manager perceptions	.919	.908	.077	See Table2	3.9	.52	See Table2
Conflict between M&S departments	Marketing Manager perceptions	.943	.915	.060	.835	2.5	.90	.939
	Sales Manager perceptions	.962	.942	.075	.849	2.6	.96	.949
Company performance	Marketing Manager perceptions	.919	.903	.078	.879	3.2	.91	.958
	Sales Manager perceptions	.921	.904	.080	.866	3.2	.87	.953

latent variable	Marketing Managers	Sales Managers
(Customer Orientation)	AVE= 0,635 > 0,5 Composite Reliability = 0,737 > 0,7 <i>Cronbach's alpha = 0,902</i>	AVE= 0,679 > 0,5 Composite Reliability = 0,721 > 0,7 <i>Cronbach's alpha = 0,887</i>
(Competitive Orientation)	AVE= 0,617 > 0,5 Composite Reliability = 0,754 > 0,7 <i>Cronbach's alpha = 0,816</i>	AVE= 0,631 > 0,5 Composite Reliability = 0,708 > 0,7 <i>Cronbach's alpha = 0,760</i>
(Inter-Functional Coordination)	AVE= 0,629 > 0,5 Composite Reliability = 0,730 > 0,7 <i>Cronbach's alpha = 0,826</i>	AVE= 0,620 > 0,5 Composite Reliability = 0,719 > 0,7 <i>Cronbach's alpha = 0,778</i>

Company Strategy: McKee, Varadarajan and Pride's (1989) operationalisation was adopted in order to capture the perceptions of M&S managers regarding the type of their company's strategy. Thus, each manager was provided with the definition of the three strategies of Miles and Snow (1978) typology (*Prospector*, *Analyzer*, and *Defender*) and was asked to indicate the strategy which he/she perceived as being his/her company's strategy. Through this operationalisation, the companies were classified in two groups, as shown in Table 3, whereby group1 contains companies in which the M&S managers had similar perceptions regarding their company's strategy (80%), while group2 contains companies in which the two managers had different perceptions regarding the strategy in question (20%). Thus, a dichotomous 0, 1 measurement was devised whereby the value of 0 stands for companies in group2, while the value of 1 stands for companies in group1.

Group 1 - Consistency		Group 2 - Inconsistency	
prospector	68 (65%)	prospector-analyzer	18 (67%)
analyzer	24 (23%)	prospector-defender	3 (11%)
defender	13 (12%)	analyzer-defender	6 (22%)
N=105 – 80%		N=27 – 20%	

Conflict: The seven-item scale developed by Jaworski and Kohli (1993) measuring interdepartmental conflict was adapted in order to capture the level of conflict between M&S departments. Both managers indicated, using a 5-point Likert type scale (where 1 stands for low level of conflict and 5 stands for high level of

conflict), their degree of agreement with each of the seven items of the scale. Two CFAs (one for each manager) were conducted in order to assess the reliability and validity of this reflective measure, as shown in Table 1. Independent samples t-test indicated no significant differences in the opinions of M&S managers regarding the level of conflict between M&S departments (*Marketing managers mean=2.56 / Sales managers mean=2.61 / t=-0.396 / ns-sig=0.407*). Thus the mean value of the responses of the two managers from each company was computed and used as a composite measure of M&S conflict (*mean value=2.6, Std.dev.=0.9*).

Company Performance: Company performance was measured in terms of profits, sales volume, market share and ROI (e.g. Narver and Slater, 1990; Avlonitis and Gounaris, 1997). The two managers indicated, using a five point scale, the firm's performance in comparison with their main competitor (1: much worse, 5: much better), as well as the degree of the firm's satisfaction (1: very displeased, 5: very pleased), for each one of the four performance criteria. Two CFAs (one for each manager) were conducted in order to assess the reliability and validity of this reflective measure, as shown in Table 1. Independent samples t-test indicated no significant differences in the opinions of M&S managers regarding company performance (*Marketing managers mean=3.21 / Sales managers mean=3.20 / t=0.60 / ns-sig=0.522*). Thus, the mean value of four summated scales, two from each manager and from each company, was computed and was used as a composite measure of company performance (*mean value=3.21, Std.dev.=0.91*).

4. Analyses and results

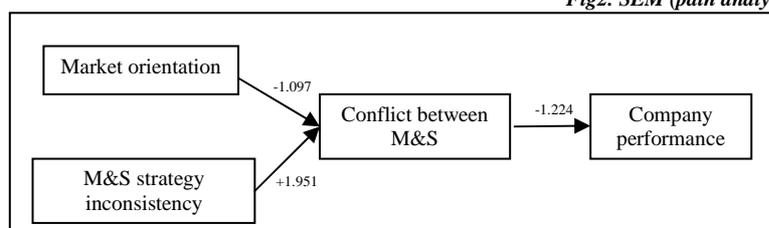
4.1 Model testing

In order to examine the research model SEM (path analysis) was conducted as shown in Table4. Using standard procedures for correlations between categorical variables (*strategy consistency/inconsistency*) and continuous latent variables (*market orientation, M&S conflict, and company performance*) we adopted the Generalized Least Squares (GLS) estimation procedure (Lee, Poon, and Bentler, 1992). The result of this analysis is significant at the 0.05 level and overall suggests that (a) market orientation has a strong negative impact on the level of conflict between M&S, (b) inconsistencies in the perceptions of M&S managers regarding their company's strategy is enhancing the level of conflict between M&S departments, and (c) the level of this conflict has a strong negative impact on company performance. Thus, hypotheses H1a, H2a, and H3 are confirmed. Fig.2 depicts the results of the SEM analysis.

Table 4. Research Model		
	Marketing-Sales Conflict B (unstandardized) / (t-statistic)	Company Performance B (unstandardized) / (t-statistic)
Market Orientation	-1.097 / (t=2.189*)	---
Strategy Inconsistency	+1.951 / (t=1.168*)	---
Marketing-Sales Conflict	---	-1.224 / (t=4.964*)

Estimation procedure: GLS
latent variables: market orientation, marketing-sales conflict, company performance
categorical variable: strategy consistency
 * significant at the 0.05 level
 Fit indices: TLI=.934 / CFI=.948 / GFI=.948 / RMSEA=.051 / $\chi^2 = 632.112$ / df = 2 / p = 0.0000

Fig2. SEM (path analysis)



4.2 Examination of the Marketing-Sales conflict as a mediator in the model

4.2.1 The relationship between market orientation and company performance

Prior studies have shown that market orientation can have a direct effect on company performance (e.g., Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Narver and Slater, 1990). In this paper, we examined the mediating role of M&S conflict in the relationship between market orientation and company performance by following the standard three-step procedure of mediation analysis (Baron and Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Hoffman, 2002). Firstly, two SEMs were conducted as shown in Table 5 and depicted in Fig. 3. The first SEM examines the impact of market orientation on M&S conflict as well as the impact of M&S conflict on company performance; whereas the second SEM includes, in addition to these relationships, the direct effect of market orientation on company performance. Secondly, we calculated (a) the chi-square difference between the two models ($\Delta\chi^2=98.897$), and (b) the percentage value of chi-square distribution ($\Delta\chi^2=6.64 / df=1 / p<0.01$). Finally, the comparison between the afore-mentioned (a) and (b) indicates that the M&S conflict is a partial mediator in the direct relationship between market orientation and company performance, because (a) is greater than (b). Thus, it seems that a reduction in the level of M&S conflict through the implementation of market orientation is enhancing the direct positive relationship between market orientation and company performance. Consequently, it appears that the enhanced performance of market oriented companies is partially explained through their ability to reduce the level of M&S conflict.

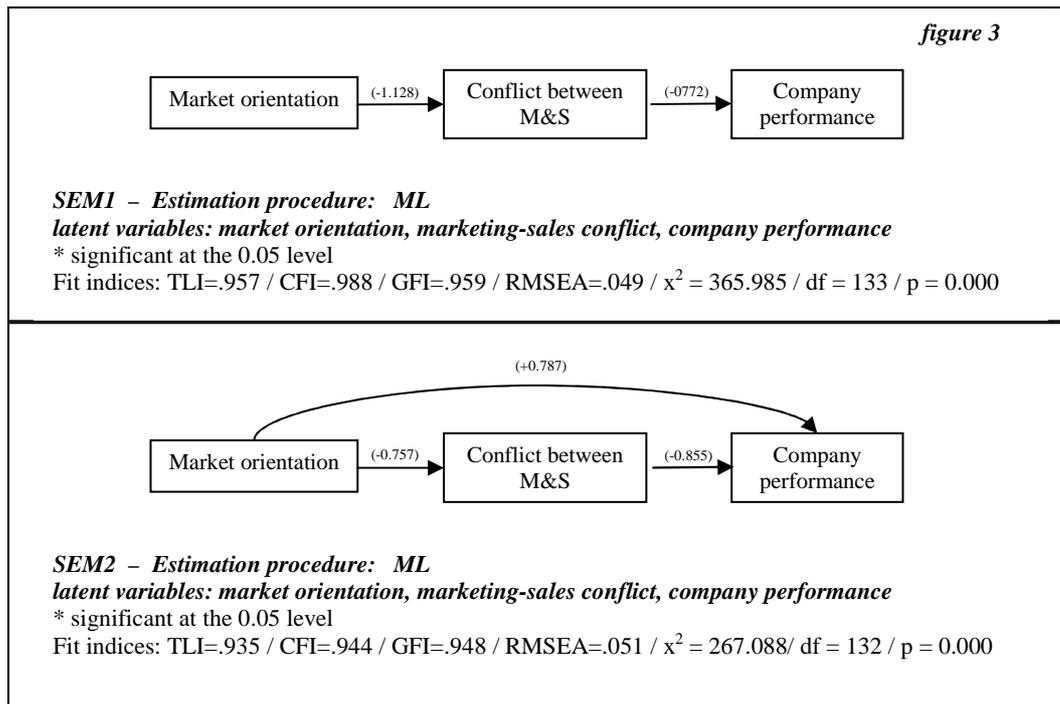


Table 5. The mediation effect of Marketing-Sales conflict		
	Marketing-Sales Conflict B (unstandardized) / (t-statistic)	Company Performance B (unstandardized) / (t-statistic)
Market Orientation	-1.128 / (t=0.115*)	---
Marketing-Sales Conflict	---	-.772 / (t=0.146*)
<i>SEM1 – Estimation procedure: ML</i> <i>latent variables: market orientation, marketing-sales conflict, company performance</i> * significant at the 0.05 level Fit indices: TLI=.957 / CFI=.988 / GFI=.959 / RMSEA=.049 / $\chi^2 = 365.985$ / df = 133 / p = 0.0000		
	Marketing-Sales Conflict B (unstandardized) / (t-statistic)	Company Performance B (unstandardized) / (t-statistic)
Market Orientation	-.757 / (t=0.375*)	+.787 / (t=0.568*)
Marketing-Sales Conflict	---	-.855 / (t=0.447*)
<i>SEM2 – Estimation procedure: ML</i> <i>latent variables: market orientation, marketing-sales conflict, company performance</i> * significant at the 0.05 level Fit indices: TLI=.935 / CFI=.944 / GFI=.948 / RMSEA=.051 / $\chi^2 = 267.088$ / df = 132 / p = 0.0000		

4.2.2 The relationship between strategy consistency/inconsistency and company performance

The same methodological approach for examining mediation (Baron and Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Hoffman, 2002) was adopted in order to examine the mediation effect of the M&S conflict in the relationship between the consistency/inconsistency in the perceptions of M&S managers regarding company's strategy and company performance. Therefore, two SEMs were conducted, as shown in Table6 and depicted in Figure 4, where the first SEM examines the impact of (a)

strategy consistency/inconsistency on M&S conflict, and (b) M&S conflict on company performance, while the second SEM includes, in addition to these relationships, the direct effect of strategy consistency/inconsistency on company performance. The comparison between the chi-square difference of the two models ($\Delta\chi^2=4.119$) and the percentage value of chi-square distribution ($\Delta\chi^2=6.64 / df=1 / p<0.01$) indicates that the M&S conflict is not a partial mediator in the direct relationship between strategy consistency/inconsistency and company performance (because $4.119<6.64$). Thus, it seems that the negative effect of M&S conflict on company performance is not an element of the direct effect of inconsistencies in the perceptions of M&S managers regarding their company's strategy on company performance. In other words, the above analysis show that inconsistencies between M&S view's regarding company's strategy are hurting company performance regardless the level of conflict between M&S.

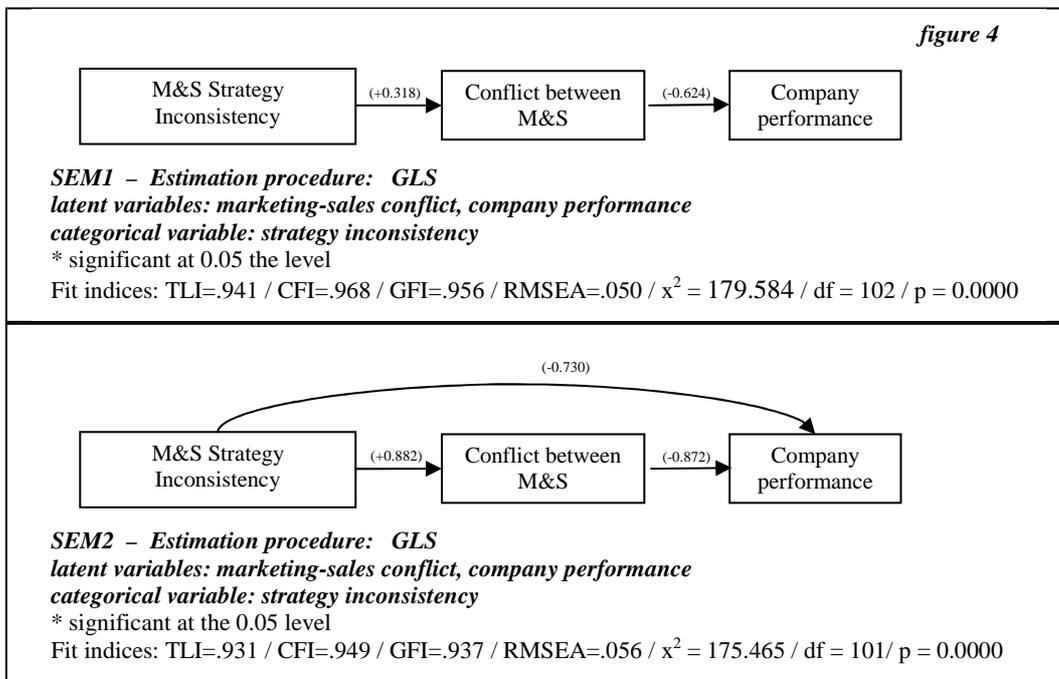


Table 6. The mediation effect of Marketing-Sales conflict		
	Marketing-Sales Conflict B / (t-statistic)	Company Performance B / (t-statistic)
Strategy inconsistency	+.318 / (t=0.357*)	---
Marketing-Sales Conflict	---	-.624 / (t=0.468*)
<i>SEM1 – Estimation procedure: GLS</i> <i>latent variables: marketing-sales conflict, company performance</i> <i>categorical variable: strategy inconsistency</i> * significant at the 0.05 level Fit indices: TLI=.941 / CFI=.968 / GFI=.956 / RMSEA=.050 / $\chi^2 = 179.584$ / df = 102 / p = 0.0000		
	Marketing-Sales Conflict B (unstandardized) / (t-statistic)	Company Performance B (unstandardized) / (t-statistic)
Strategy inconsistency	+.882 / (t=0.479*)	-.730 / (t=0.588*)
Marketing-Sales Conflict	---	-.872 / (t=0.569*)
<i>SEM2 – Estimation procedure: GLS</i> <i>latent variables: marketing-sales conflict, company performance</i> <i>categorical variable: strategy inconsistency</i> * significant at the 0.05 level Fit indices: TLI=.931 / CFI=.949 / GFI=.937 / RMSEA=.056 / $\chi^2 = 175.465$ / df = 101 / p = 0.0000		

5. Conclusions – implications

The present study is one of the very few empirical investigations on M&S conflict, and the only one which base its results on the perceptions of both M&S managers of the same organization, following the pertinent extensive calls of the relevant literature (e.g. Korhmer et al., 2002; Dawes and Massey, 2005; Guenzi and Troilo, 2006; Homburg et al., 2008).

To start with, a major implication of this study is a clearer understanding of the effect of the conflict between the M&S departments on company performance. Our research provides empirical data demonstrating that conflict between M&S have a strong negative impact on company performance. This finding supports the relative normative literature (e.g. Shapiro, 2002; Kotler et al., 2006; Meunier-FitzHugh and Percy, 2007).

Secondly, the literature suggests that M&S effective relationship is one of the components of market-driven organizations (Rouziès et al., 2005; Guenzi and Troilo, 2006). Our findings concur with these results, by indicating that the adoption of market orientation can reduce the level of M&S conflict. Moreover our study provides

findings which support the positive relationship between market orientation and company performance (e.g Avlonitis and Gounaris, 1997; Cano et al., 2004), placing the M&S conflict as a mediator in this relationship. These findings are highly connected with the consideration of “inter-functional coordination” as a basic component of market orientation (Narver and Slater, 1990). Specifically, it seems that the adoption of market orientation can reduce the level of M&S conflict by enhancing inter-functional coordination and consequently its direct positive effect on company performance.

Thirdly, our research empirically demonstrates that a source of conflict between M&S is inconsistencies in the managers’ perceptions regarding company’s strategy. Moreover, it seems that these inconsistencies are hurting company performance regardless of their effect on the level of M&S conflict. These findings support the suggestions made in the literature which highlight the necessity for the strategic alignment of M&S (e.g. Shapiro, 2002).

Overall, our findings show clearly the need for companies to (a) adopt market orientation, and (b) eliminate any differences in the perceptions of M&S managers regarding their company’s strategy, in order to reduce the level of conflict between M&S, and attain superior performance.

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