

# **Marketing's footprint in the boardroom: Antecedents and outcomes**

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# Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material, which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014.

The proposed research study received human research ethics approval from the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (EC00262), Approval Number #HRE2019-0256

Signature: .....

Date: 02 August 2021

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# Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family, my husband Sheldon and my three daughters, Niamh, Emmerson and Aaliyah, without whom I am nothing.

# Abstract

Despite the growing influence of marketing in our everyday lives, its relevance in the executive boardroom as a valued member of the top management team continues to be debated in academic research. Current literature argues that the marketing discipline could be suffering from an identity crisis and losing both relevance and influence within the organisation, which may explain the noticeable absence of marketing managers from the upper echelons of decision-making.

With this decline in the presence and contribution of marketing in the boardroom, there is a fear that organisations may ignore the customer perspective and marketing orientation, which may have a severe adverse impact on their long-term performance. However, despite such importance of this topic, there is limited scholarly research and no consensus on the reasons for the failure of marketing managers to join the top management team, through that participate in, and influence strategic decision-making in organisations.

This research addresses the above gap by exploring the lived experiences of executive leaders in Australian organisations to understand, a) the reasons for marketing managers being unable to move up beyond middle management level, b) lack of recognition for marketing being universally accepted as a core boardroom responsibility, and c) the obstacles faced by marketing managers in playing a strategic role in helping to shape organisational level decisions.

This study adopts a qualitative methodology using a phenomenological approach to extend current research on this topic by creating new knowledge about marketing's impact in the executive boardroom through the reality that is understood and experienced by the individual managers. Field data was collected using semi-structured interviews and results were analysed and interpreted through the theoretical lenses of the Upper Echelons and Stakeholder Management perspectives.

Results show that that the marketing discipline has not become obsolete and in fact, it is considered an essential ingredient in strategic decision-making and as a key driver of organisational performance and success. Marketing's capabilities in stakeholder

management, creativity, innovation and growth provide tremendous opportunity for marketing to anchor itself firmly into the upper echelons of the organisation.

Findings also provided new insights as to the challenges the marketing discipline encounters in climbing the corporate hierarchy including organisational readiness to embrace change, CEO legacy, confusion over the role and purpose of marketing, strategic priorities and organisational propensity for growth and innovation.

This research foreshadows an upcoming maelstrom of change for the marketing discipline where organisations transform their outlook from historical growth, return on capital and dividends to shareholders to metrics that consider the quadruple bottom line, gauge longer-term health metrics that align strategic imperatives with stakeholder value creation. Marketing practitioners can use these changes to its advantage by entering the top management teams and claiming its rightful position in the boardroom.

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# List of Abbreviations

ASX: Australian Stock Exchange

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CMO: Chief Marketing Officer

C-Suite: Executive Suite

FTE: Full Time Equivalent

GM: General Manager

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

TMT: Top Management Team

UK FTSE: United Kingdom Financial Times & Stock Exchange

US: United States

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Motivation

Despite the marketing discipline being capable of generating new business at the same time helping the organisation respond to environmental uncertainty as well as a wide range of other challenges (Mitrega et al., 2011; Morgan et al., 2009; Ripolles, 2011; Rust et al., 2004; Saleh, 2015) the discipline appears to have limited influence within the upper echelons of the organisation. Of particular concern for marketing professionals and scholars in that regard has been the discipline's perceived inability to play an important role in the executive boardroom. Hence, the noticeable absence from the Top Management Team (TMT) (Carver, 2009; Gilliat & Cuming, 2017; Smith et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2003, Webster & Lusch, 2013) has prevented marketing from playing a fully active role in shaping organisational level decisions. This lack of influence appears to run contrary to Webster's (1992) depiction of the marketing discipline who advocates that it should not just be represented as a function within the organisation but also permeate into tactical, strategic and corporate levels. More importantly, Webster points out that since marketing is so critical to the success of an organisation, and argues further that the discipline needs to be viewed as an integral part of the organisational cultural DNA, if decision makers are to attain optimal organisational and stakeholder outcomes. In effect, this means that the marketing discipline can only fully play a critical role in contributing to organisational outcomes if it gains and maintains a presence within the executive boardroom. Thus, due to the potential role that the marketing discipline can play, exploring this narrative is the focus of this research.

However, the literature does continue to indicate that marketing is not universally viewed as a core boardroom responsibility and it has limited influence within organisations. For example, on the one hand some authors (e.g. Auh & Merlo, 2010; Homburg et al., 2015) concede that marketing is imbedded within organisations successfully, while others argue that there is still inadequate application of marketing (e.g. Nath & Mahajan, 2011; Strandvik, et al., 2014; Webster & Lusch, 2013). When considering marketing as a potential contributor to corporate level outcomes some scholars even go further and argue that it is idealistic or even myopic to think marketing can assert itself at the helm of supreme

corporate strategy (Abernathy et al., 2013; Nath, & Mahajan, 2008; O'Sullivan & Butler, 2010). In contrast, other scholars point out that marketing is the fulcrum of business, with relevance and significance (Auh & Merlo, 2010; Mattsson et al., 2006; McDonald, 2006) so given these inconsistencies in the literature, the overarching question being posed in this research is whether marketing at the executive board level is able to help create value for the organisation?

The intention of this study is to understand the obstacles that marketers are confronted with, in gaining a seat in the executive suite. Moreover, this research intends to gain further insights as to what marketing professionals need to do to increase their chances of being admitted into the executive boardroom. Finally, this research will help to establish the contribution that marketing's presence in the boardroom can play in serving to optimise organisational performance and success. Besides the core challenge facing the marketing discipline appears to be an inherent identity crisis in terms of the role it plays within the organisation (e.g. Bartels, 1988; Levy, 2002; Sheth & Sisodia, 2002), there is also much confusion about the strategic notions of the discipline and its role within the TMT (Brooksbank et al., 2010; Qin et al., 2013).

Typically, there appears to be a widespread perception among organisational executives that marketing primarily consists of promotional puffery and lacks strategic substance (Schwarzkopf, 2011). This limited (and rather myopic) viewpoint of the discipline clearly pays scant attention to the crucial strategic dimensions of marketing (Brooksbank et al., 2010; Gronroos, 2006) and thus the role it can potentially play within the top tiers of the organisation (McAlister, 2005). This research is therefore focused on understanding the role that the marketing discipline can play as a strategic partner worthy of valuable contribution in the upper echelons of the organisation. This will help to establish how scholars and marketing professionals can restore and/or reinvigorate the credibility of the discipline within the organisation and in the boardroom (Day & Montgomery, 1999; Hanssens & Pauwels, 2016; O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007; Weinzimmer et al., 2003; Wirtz et al., 2014). It will also help to answer calls in the literature to explore how top management defines and through that views marketing and its roles in reality (O'Sullivan et al., 2010; Strandvik et al.,

2014). This will help improve the credibility of the marketing discipline and further the endeavours of those marketing professionals to play a key strategic role in the organisation in terms of being part of the boardroom and its critical decision making processes.

To illustrate the reduced credibility of marketing within the organisation, Guadalupe and Wulf (2010) found that executive structures had doubled over the past decade from five executive members to 10, with the marketing discipline missing from this important strategic planning table. Some scholars suggest that when looking at the attainment of organisational goals and capability, involving all disciplines is critical to success (Al-Haddad & Kothour, 2015; Goleman, 2000; Haldar, 2006) because it is everything working together in the attainment of goals that makes an organisation competitively fit. Despite this, Marketing Directors (also commonly known as the Chief Marketing Officer or CMO) that exemplify the highest echelon of leadership within the marketing function (Boyd et al., 2010) are regarded with much trepidation in the strategic roles that these positions may hold in the executive suite (C-suite). Typifying this observation, the ASX 100 reveals only 22 companies have a CMO reported in their executive general management ranks. Moreover, marketing has a low presence in Australian boardrooms, with only 5.1% of ASX300 board members possessing marketing experience (Watermark Search, 2017). In comparison, Bennett (2009) cites in his research that, “only 14 of the UK FTSE 100 companies had a marketing director on their main boards, according to a survey completed by the Chartered Institute of Marketing in 2006”, (p30). This suggests that organisations do see an important role for marketing in the upper echelons but this may not have filtered through into the Australian boardrooms.

What’s more, the CMOs average tenure remains considerably shorter when compared with their TMT counterparts (Murphy, 1998). Across Australia, for example, examining the list of CMO50 in 2018, the average tenure for a CMO is 3 years, 7 months (Mitchell et al., 2020). Comparatively, an analysis conducted by Korn Ferry of the top 1000 US companies by revenue, found the average tenure for a member of the C-suite was 4.9 years (Mitchell et al., 2020). Since the reasons attributed to CMOs having the shortest tenure of all the C-suite, may be the role they are perceived to play in contributing to value (McIntyre et al.,

2007; Nath & Mahajan, 2008) this research will help to establish the role that marketing professionals can potentially play on Australian boards. In that regard, it is worth exploring whether the short CMO tenure in Australia may not just be centred on apparent inability of incumbents in the role to deliver and express quantifiable returns but rather a reflection of an organisation lacking understanding of the role that CMOs can potentially play in driving longer-term business outcomes.

This line of investigation will also help to ascertain if CMO turnover is possibly a scapegoat, for an organisation lacking clarity around marketing deliverables (Nath & Mahajan, 2017). An underlying assumption underpinning this is that organisations adjust their strategies, including executive team changes in order to become better aligned with the environment (Boeker, 1997; McIntyre et al., 2007; Nath & Mahajan, 2017). Hence, the question of whether marketing executives in the C-suite ecosystem are being blamed for an organisation's declining performance and not being recognised for the positive contribution they can potentially make might be driven by other extraneous organisational factors.

First, changes to the population ecology within an organisation are often undertaken to bring about improvements to efficiency and performance, whereby organisations identify the knowledge that is important for success and create a synergistic structure to suit (Johnson et al., 2008). Kavale (2012) does however argue that there is a strong temptation to isolate structure as a precursor to performance but, in spite of this, an organisation may still not be able improve performance, effectively ending up in the same position or worse. Therefore, since it is essential that structure be assimilated with strategy (Johnson et al., 2008) this then implies that getting the right competencies into the boardroom is tantamount to help ensure optimal organisational performance. In that regard, similarly to organisational theorists (e.g. Johnson et al., 2008; Mintzberg, 1987), Kavale (2012, p.63) states that structure is "the formal distribution of roles and the administrative mechanisms which facilitate the control and integration of the different activities performed".

Unfortunately, the snapshot of corporate Australia illustrates marketing is experiencing continental drift whereby organisations appropriating their workforces are isolating marketing from where organisational strategy is conceived (McGovern et al., 2004). There

is no questioning that the boardroom is where this business activity is done because members of the board possess and exert the muscle power in developing the overarching vision to influence strategic outcomes. According to Doyle (2000), top management teams garner knowledge throughout the organisation and use this in the boardroom to isolate and cultivate strategic drivers that accelerate growth, increase profit margins and leverage investments. Given the important and critical role of marketing within the organisation (Gronroos, 2006; Jocumson, 2004; Strandvik et al., 2014; Webster, 1992), it is therefore imperative to understand why senior marketing professionals are finding it difficult to gain and sustain executive boardroom roles within Australian organisations.

Second, the structure of an organisation may hampers strategic choice (Hall & Saias, 1980) and diminish the capacity of marketing professionals to join the board. In their study, these authors postulate that organisational growth results from an awareness of opportunities and being able to act on them. This implies that the executive table membership is largely determined by the functions that an organisation needs to perform at any given point in time to achieve the overarching strategy. Existing normative and rigid structures may prohibit leadership 'creativity' in pursuing opportunities outside of the verticals represented at the table and thus lessen the chances of a marketing presence in the boardroom. This assertion has some support in the literature. For example, organisational strategy is cited to be instrumental in executive selection (Boone et al., 2004; Westphal & Zajac, 1995) which may imply that that any strategy that is not driven by marketing professionals on the board effectively acts to reinforce their non-selection on the board. However, as the likes of Balta (2008) and Geyer (2016) cite, given the organisation becomes a mirror of its executive managers, and therefore, they become the primary shapers of strategic choice there is a perennial need at lower 'non-board' levels in the organisation to have the right people at the top.

Third, upper echelons theory depicts that organisational outcomes are fundamentally a function of the decision making of the TMT (Abatecola et al., 2013; Hambrick & Mason, 1984) so it is in the longer-term interests of the marketing profession to demonstrate the ongoing contribution that marketing potentially plays at all organisational levels. Empirical

work observing this theory exhaust physical characteristics such as age, ethnic and functional background, as underlying proxies, shaping how environmental cues are interpreted and responded to (Carpenter et al., 2004). However, there is a need to build upon this typology to encompass the role that various professions (including marketing) working together in a harmonious manner so they can bring distinctiveness of interaction between members of the TMT. For example, a group comprised of multiple professions can work effectively together to arrive at decisions and the consequential impact of these decisions on organisational outcomes (Carpenter et al., 2004; Cyert & March, 1963). As organisational theorist James Thompson (1967) asserts, “Executives will differ in their awareness of strategic stimuli largely through variation in experiences, capabilities, values and personalities”, (p.101). Many decisions made at the top are complex, often ambiguous and are made with uncertain outcomes (Eisenhardt et al., 1988). As decisions made at this level subsequently impact corporate performance, then having a broad based disciplinary TMT will help with the boardroom dynamics, and in particular help with each members ability to contribute and influence strategic choice (Bjornali et al., 2016; Van Knippenberg & Mell, 2016). At the most basic level, unless the people sitting around the table responsible for strategic choice represent a variety of disciplines, functions and viewpoints it is unlikely they will make the best decisions (Carpenter et al., 2004; Van Knippenberg & Mell, 2016).

Fourth, board diversity has quickly gained momentum in both academic and business circles, with mounting evidence to suggest heterogeneous perspectives around the table make for better decision making, due to the ability to generate different alternatives (Miller & Triana, 2009; Rao & Tilt, 2016). A common theme in the literature is that the breadth of strategic choice is categorically increased when heterogeneity exists at the apex of the organisation. Largely given the propensity and willingness of team members to challenge and debate each other, reflected in their personal ideas, beliefs and values (Carpenter et al., 2004; Norburn & Birley, 1988). Therefore, it goes without saying that individuals at this level inject a great deal of themselves into their decisions, thus the underlying assertion made in this research is that marketing will help add to good debate and governance in Australian executive boardrooms (Park & Gould, 2017).



Fifth, it is through the group executive lens, that subsequent organisational performance in part is determined by the strategic choices made, for good or for ill (Finkestein et al., 2009). Whilst evidence substantiating the impact of marketing capabilities alone on organisational performance is scarce and conceivably incomplete, it is of course going to be the group of top executives (including marketing) that are the primary shapers of strategic direction (Bailey & Peck, 2013; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). For that reason, this research postulates that it is important to broaden the unit of analysis in the boardroom to include CMOs into the constellation of executives to help ensure optimal organisational performance. As Tollin and Schmidt (2015) note, it is how an organisation is managed in the boardroom in terms of revelling in the differences between managers skill-sets at this top level, which may deliver elevated organisational performance. Presumably, executives do not make it to the TMT by accident. So one question that will be addressed in this research is to what extent personal characteristics and core competencies preside over the likelihood that a manager will climb up the corporate ladder? While the elimination of a CMO from the boardroom is notable (Carver, 2009; Gilliat & Cuming, 2017; Smith et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2003) and may appear to be linked to their performance, it is important to understand why marketing fails to succeed in higher leadership positions.

Specifically, why additional exertion is needed to become board members, considering that marketing professionals would have the core competencies, innate personality traits and professional capital in facilitating the trajectory of the corporate marketing department to the boardroom (Webster, 2005). As organisations in Australia, and indeed globally, wrestle with balancing costs and investing in innovation to drive growth and increase profit margins, it is arguably the combined knowledge of individuals residing within an organisation that provides the opportunity for increased competitive advantage (Argote & Ingram, 2000; Thomas, 1988). However, the individual attributes of board members and the topics they pay attention to, are rarely documented and hence, are addressed here.

Finally, an important inquiry for both research and practice is how the permutation of marketing in the TMT may be a determinant for enriched organisational capability, considering the discipline has a unique ability to drive organisational outcomes such as

stakeholder satisfaction and customer value (Moorman & Day 2016; Young et al., 2008). Historically balancing stakeholder needs has been considered an obstacle in achieving corporate outcomes. For example, shareholders have traditionally exerted major influence on an organisation's executive in their quest for dividends (Oviatt, 1988); hence, organisational choices have primarily been dominated by the pursuit of efficiency, effectiveness and profitability (Oviatt, 1988). However, there has been a shift in the balance of power with a resurgence of interest in a more expansive breadth of stakeholders. Taking the position that engaging and considering the values of all stakeholders is not only the responsibility of the organisation but an essential element in success (Berman et al., 1999). This means that decisions made in the boardroom that consider more than one stakeholder, are less likely to sacrifice long-term competitiveness for short-term profits (Doyle, 2000).

For this reason, the strategic importance of customer, competition and competitiveness decisions that are core aspects of marketing thinking are arguably needed in the boardroom to help ensure the underpinnings of executional excellence are present in corporate decisions. However, transforming concepts like customer value and stakeholder satisfaction from futile catchphrases to exact measurements on the C-suite agenda is perhaps the most significant challenge facing marketers today (Verbeke & Tung, 2013). Marketing is uniquely positioned to perform as a data aggregator, interpreter and disseminator in terms of being able to distil consumer insights into strategy to achieve customer centric business growth that distinguishes one organisation from another (Kindstrom, 2010). Therefore, if marketing can be successful in the judicious balancing of tensions between short-term cost drivers and capital allocation whilst defending both short and long-term growth merits of customer-led strategy then the discipline has an instrumental role to play in the C-suite. This helps to address the gap in the literature pertaining to the need for further research to help uncover alternative measures of performance in the context of stakeholder value (Carver, 2009; Knox, 2002), and in particular the role that marketing's presence in the boardroom can play in that process. This is important, as an organisations philosophy towards their stakeholders will play a significant role in both organisational culture and how marketing manifests itself.

Organisational culture is one of the most studied constructs in management research,

including the role of leaders and their impact on organisational performance (Leisen et al., 2002). A number of studies reflect this by showing that the Chief Executive Officers (CEO) leadership style may help break cultural paradigms by leading the charge so to speak, setting the tone on the importance of employees, customers and a myriad of other stakeholders (e.g. Pearce & Zahra, 1991; Quigley & Hambrick, 2015; Vera & Crossan, 2004; Yamak et al., 2014). Consequently, it is conceivable that the leadership style of the CEO may exert influence over marketing's position in the organisation and the role it plays in stakeholder management at a strategic level. Previous studies (e.g. Jogaratham, 2017; Kasper, 2005; Payne, 1988) have investigated links between culture and market orientation. However, as highlighted by Makri & Scandura (2010) in their study, research into the field of CEO sway and influence over organisational creativity and marketing has been relatively limited. For example, it is plausible that if a CEO's leadership style is one that openly encourages creativity and they possess a willingness to exploit strategies that capitalise on opportunities as they present, then this would positively influence others to seek out and connect with inventive endeavours.

## **1.2 Originality of Research Idea**

There are growing calls for studies examining the role that marketing can play in the executive suite (e.g. Gronroos, 2006; Hanssens & Pauwels, 2016; O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007; Weinzimmer et al., 2003; Wirtz et al., 2014) as the limited studies detailing marketing's specific leadership profile and contribution to bottom line are inadequate to explain the lack of board representation for marketing professionals. This research attempts to address this paucity of understanding for a number of reasons.

First, the United States (US) has been the context for much of the research on the role of marketing and the paucity of marketers in the TMT. However, with the diversification of global economy, their previously held economic power has gradually shifted to other parts of the world with their own social, economic and cultural differences. This has meant studies, such as this research are needed to help better understand executive boardroom dynamics in other parts of the world. This research will thus examine these dynamics within the context of Western Australia (WA). The economy in this Australian state is highly advanced consisting of diverse sectors, such as mining, manufacturing and services.

Second, previous studies have largely concentrated on quantitative studies that limit the in-depth understanding of such dynamics, and these have also tended to focus on publicly listed firms, and therefore do not help fully explain the role of marketing professionals in boardrooms across the suite of organisational types. The lack of studies exploring how the various disciplines, such as marketing are able to contribute to good boardroom decisions across the private and public sectors are scant in the literature. For example, research to date has ignored the impact that persons with knowledge of brand equity, stakeholder satisfaction, long-term financial-performance metrics and interdisciplinary relationships have on strategic choice. Not having these individuals in the boardroom places limitations on understanding how the modern executive suite is able to deal with these critical marketing and organisational dynamics. Moreover, the literature in this domain is somewhat obtuse as it tends to scrutinise marketing's role and bearing over sales growth and short-term profitability (Barroso-Castro et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2014; Homburg et al., 2015; Nath & Mahajan, 2008). Therefore, this tranche of literature does little to appreciate the strategic role that marketing can play in the boardroom, as well as explain how marketing professionals can move into and remain in the boardroom. This study aims to widen current understanding and examine the potential strategic role that marketing professionals can play as members of boards.

Third, many empirical studies in this domain have yielded ambiguous results, so this research provides a further opportunity to clarify what role senior marketing professionals in the boardroom can play in helping to contribute to optimal organisational performance. This is important to understand, as it is likely to be the key to their ongoing presence in the boardroom. Fourth, research elsewhere emphasising this new research direction in understanding the underlying conditions for marketing representation in TMTs in different countries and organisational settings also indicates much needed research is required in other countries around the world. For example, whilst the US and Australia endure a relationship strengthened by shared egalitarian tenets, collective interests, and cultural similarities much of the focus of the literature has been in the US. Both countries do embody large scale, developed, and mature economies, and, the notion of leadership has been adapted over time and seen as holistic. However, examining the dynamics of board

membership through such a single lens largely overlooks the variation in cultural settings and contexts. Clearly, a paucity of studies within an Australian setting limits understanding of how marketing professionals are perceived as functional members in Australian boardrooms, a gap addressed in this research.

Fifth, WA has been selected for the context of this study as the structure of the WA economy helps provide a wider, more multidisciplinary perspective on the topic. The central argument in this research is that there needs to be an understanding of the relationship between TMT, marketing and corporate performance to gauge the impact that marketing professionals can play in the executive boardroom. To this end, since WA is Australia's most trade-orientated state, with the mining sector continuing to be a large economic pillar and leading source of income there is an array of interlinked industries. Typically, the services sector represents a sizeable constituent of pecuniary yield relative to other industries, which is an industry founded upon producing value that is predominantly intangible such as customer service, management advice, knowledge and experiences (Payne et al., 2008). Since these are the pillars of the marketing discipline, in which both the product and service industries (private and public) utilise marketing in their business practices. Therefore, WA serves a suitable focus for this study, affording a balance between good producing industries such as mining and manufacturing and services such as health and banking, to allow for comparisons in organisational practices.

Finally, since the author of this research originates from WA and practices the marketing discipline in her professional industry role this ongoing empirical industry experience places her in a unique position to understand both the need and nuances required to undertake this research. Moreover, the jurisdiction has seen an increased number of marketers admitted to TMTs, but the impact of this is yet to be explored and/or understood. Thus, by drawing on her industry experiences and underpinning the study in stakeholder management and upper echelons theories to help address the underlying research gaps this will offer a new interpretation as to why marketers need to be considered as prime board member candidates capable of helping the organisation create value for their organisations and stakeholders. The author believes that the industries selected for the basis of this

research are appropriate in addressing the research questions.

To that end, the author is in an inimitable position as she has a prevailing network of collegial contacts in WA having worked in both the public and private sectors. It is through these networks that it was possible to obtain an overview of the challenges facing marketing professionals wanting to become members of the executive boardroom. Moreover, her contacts have helped to facilitate access to industry professionals, which made data collection more straightforward. In summation, the convergence of these ideas and personal experiences of the author help contribute to the originality of this research, at the same time help to address the limited understanding of the nuances and dynamics associated with marketing professionals operating on boards of organisations in WA.

### **1.3 Research Context**

The literature tends to indicate that marketing professionals unfortunately have not been traditionally welcomed into the realms of executive management (Hanssens & Pauwels, 2016; Klaus et al., 2014; McDonald, 2006; Wirtz et al., 2014). Thus, the net impact of this has been a reduced voice for the marketing discipline in terms of contributing to strategy and decision making within the organisation (Balta, 2008). This empirical reality has also been observed by the author of this research through personal experience, when working over many years in the public and private sectors. In her accumulated experiences, marketing practitioners were met with trepidation if a career trajectory from middle management to top leadership was sought by these individuals. This career stagnation was extremely disconcerting to the author of this research, who felt in her industry-based experiences that the C-suite was not well equipped for undertaking any analysis and appraisal of brands, their markets and their customers.

More specifically, as boards appear to have a paucity of marketing professionals they are not able to fully appreciate how these core marketing and organisational activities can be translated into 'board level strategy' to optimise organisational outcomes. In contrast, it would seem that corporate Australia is too cumbersome and keenly fixated on cost reduction while trying to respond to market changes with ad hoc initiatives seeking growth that neglect the prophecies of important stakeholders. This has effectively reduced the role

of marketing in the organisation to a tactical level – which runs contrary to Webster’s (1992) depiction of the discipline. Thus, the author of this research fathomed that a reconciliation on marketing’s role and strategy capabilities was needed, emphasising the significance of having a C-suite member who is fundamentally concerned with balancing the need of all stakeholders and the long-term prospects of the organisation. This not only served as her personal inspiration to undertake this research but it is anticipated that the findings will serve to motivate like-minded marketing professionals, as well as help advance the discipline into the upper echelons of corporate Australia.

From a professional vantage, this is critical to undertake, as a review of the extant academic literature conceded that many of the studies that examined the role of CMOs in the TMT, focused on financial performance metrics (Clark et al., 2014; Nath & Mahajan, 2008). The common financial metrics used by organisations such as sales growth and profitability, are short-term performance measures at best and thus largely ignore the true value creating role that marketing professionals can bring to the organisation. Instinctively the current obtuse view of the discipline puts a ‘straight-jacket’ on marketing’s ability to make a positive contribution in the C-suite. Given marketing can help to attain long-term competitive and consumer advantage (Wind & Robertson, 1983) in broad terms there is a distinct gap in the literature that outlines key metrics used to evaluate CMO performance. This is critical to understand considering that brand equity, long-term impact and the interaction with other members of the TMT have great potential in helping to influence strategic choice in the quest for optimal organisational outcomes.

Existing literature cites marketing’s lack of accountability for its failure to progress up the corporate hierarchy, basing their findings largely on quantitative data. When data is derived from statistics, it fails to identify and conceptualise the issues that marketers may be faced with when seeking progression to the C-suite. Specifically, such types of research undertaken to date does not capture the rich nuances needed to fully understand the range of challenges facing marketing professionals that want to become members of the executive. For example, this methodology has failed to consider leadership factors and other organisational characteristics that may also play a role in marketing’s performance in the C-suite. As Bennett (2009) questions, whether those organisations that ceremoniously

evaluate marketing performance have a more pronounced disposition to include marketers in their executive boardroom. The current literature uncovers a shortcoming in moving beyond surface responses to developing a deeper understanding through the phenomenology of the lived experience, which may not be immediately implicit in the available data. This research therefore uncovers the richness of such empirical reality that exists in converging the recollections and interpretations of individual organisational leaders from diverse functional backgrounds. In particular, how those lived experiences are applicable to theory and management practices today, and does so through a number of pertinent research questions that are now discussed in more detail.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

Extant literature (e.g. Bennett, 2009; Carver, 2009; Nath, 2006; Nath & Mahajan, 2008) identified the factors that affect marketing's manifestation within the upper echelons in organisations. However, while this literature has paved the way for our current understanding in this important domain this also raised more questions than it answered in the mind of the author. Typically, a considerable amount of literature in the field inferred that organisations with heavy sales orientations and/or those that had CEOs with backgrounds in marketing were more prone to value marketing executives. This inference from the literature was that this experience was a prime driver in appointing marketing professionals as directors. Such a depiction largely fails to consider other orientations and the competitive environment in which an organisation operates also exerts influence in such executive appointments. This left the author wondering what the reasons were that marketing continued to be under represented in the boardroom. Thus, provided much of the impetus behind the need to further investigate how top management identified with marketing and its intrinsic roles, and whether this 'filtered' the propensity to appoint marketing professionals onto boards. Thus, the fundamental resolve and aim of this research is to discover why there remains paucity of marketers at the apex of an organisation. To summarise, this study has the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons that marketing continues to be under-represented in today's executive boardroom?



2. What can marketing practitioners do to improve their chances of becoming members of the top management team and play an important role therein?
3. Can marketing directors in the executive boardroom influence organisational performance?

### **1.5 Research Methodology**

The method of data collection for this study comprised semi-structured interviews aimed at middle-level and top-level executives, from a range of public and private sector organisations, within WA. The WA economy is not only well developed (World Economic Outlook Database, 2020), but has also been subject to significant reform of late that potentially warrants a wider disciplinary view of how corporate Australia manages their organisations (Economic Regulation Authority, 2014). In essence, this reform has ‘moved’ the WA economy away from solely price based to one now more reliant on relationships. For example, health reforms were designed to modernise the way health services are structured, governed and delivered to promote better health care outcomes and value to patients (WA Health Reform Program, 2015-2020). Subsequently consumers in this sector have been put at the forefront of all strategy and services development within the service value chain. Similarly, banking reforms were introduced to ensure Australian banks meet the expectations of their customers and their community (Liu et al., 2020). Collectively, such reforms seek to balance the interests and relationships of a broader range of stakeholders, which clearly infers the need to have marketing professionals at the upper echelons of decision-making. To be truly effective, organisational executive boards in WA (and similar settings) need to adopt a more multi-disciplinary approach to decision making, so this research attempted to tease out the role that marketing could play in the executive boardroom.

In terms of data collection, participants with diverse functional backgrounds were purposively selected (Liamputtong, 2013; Saunders et al., 2007) with the intent of obtaining a group of representative informants that were both experienced and knowledgeable on the capabilities, behaviours and decision making processes required in the executive

boardroom. Of the 12 interviews, 11 were conducted face-to-face within a localised setting while one interview took place over WebEx due to COVID19. The in-depth interviews explored the lived experience of middle and top-level executives from nine organisations. The research interviews, which ranged from 45 to 90 minutes, were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. To ascertain consistency in the interview process, all interviews were conducted by the researcher. Interviews began by asking participants to describe their backgrounds and progression to their current roles. This helped to set the scene for the collection of data as well as ensuring participants felt relaxed and comfortable with the process. This was followed by more prescriptive questioning surrounding organisational purpose, structure and roles, both individuals within and the executive management team in its entirety, focusing on the subtleties that classically occurred in decision making processes. Thus, allowing for the actual experiences of participants to be the medium to explain the phenomenon at large.

## **1.6 Significance of Study**

The significance of the current research is two-fold. Theoretically, the study has the potential to expand the current literature on stakeholder management and upper echelons theories' within the context of helping to explain marketing's presence in the executive suite. Empirically, the study will assist business leaders in understanding why marketing representation in the executive maybe the key to enhanced organisational performance. Previous studies show that marketing is under-represented in the C-suite, arguing that it has lost its strategic relevance and will continue in a state of decline (Clark et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Webster et al., 2003). Therefore, unless the reasons for this incongruity are identified more clearly, uneasiness in academia and the business community as to the role of marketing leadership will endure. This study isolates a number of antecedents in relation to personal characteristics and attributes that may ascertain the probability that an individual will climb to a position within the TMT and the executive environment. From a theoretical perspective, the study highlights the current thinking of top-level executives capturing the commonalities of what they believe constitutes marketing in reality. Consequently, providing empirical confirmation of the role marketing plays in today's organisations, which may assist marketing practitioners in their career trajectory.

The success of an organisation is assessed in terms of value added to the shareholder (McDonald, 2006; Bennett, 2009). An important stream in the marketing literature focuses predominantly on connecting marketing to organisational performance in the context of shareholder value. As such, CMOs are under incredible pressure to demonstrate how their function contributes to organisational success (Abernathy et al., 2013). However, no consensus has been reached in the extant literature as to the best measurement to capture marketing's contribution, and in particular, in the boardroom. Arguably one of the most important challenges around the executive table is ensuring strategic imperatives cross organisational boundaries and decision-making, and further that this is not heavily influenced by one set of capabilities (Joshi & Gimenez, 2014; Sheth & Sisodia, 2005). Understanding the relationship between strategic choice and various stakeholders, has prompted scholars to call for a more expansive outlook when it comes to assessing organisational performance, in order to ensure organisation success is viewed more broadly. For example as the ability to satisfy the needs of more than one stakeholder group within an organisation (Engelen et al., 2013; Gronroos, 2014; Wang et al., 2015). Accordingly, from a theoretical perspective this study offers a fresh line of inquiry to gain a deeper understanding of the impact marketing has on non-financial performance measures that influence organisational success. Utilising the substantive dimensions of various stakeholder groups and TMT attitudes and judgements towards each group, it will help to understand the need for a greater insight into the processes and actions by which executives' impact organisational outcomes (Carpenter et al., 2004).

Stakeholder management theory argues that organisations have a responsibility to balance the interests and relationships of all stakeholders, surpassing accountability to solely shareholders, thus offering an alternative approach to help understand how to improve organisational performance (Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Weinzimmer et al., 2003). Irrefutably, in and of itself, the adoption of a stakeholder perspective in the organisation holds promise of enriched relationships and it is these relationships along with other non-financial indicators, such as customer satisfaction, brand equity and employee productivity, which play a central role in an organisations performance (Freeman, 2010). This research will help establish the link, conceptually and empirically, between marketing in the TMT, its ability to

capture the perspectives of a coalition of interests and the subsequent impact on strategic choice and long-term prosperity of the organisation.

The core focus of this research therefore examines the interwoven relationship between upper echelon and stakeholder management theories, as together they potentially play a formidable role in shaping marketing's positioning within the organisation and marketing's subsequent influence over strategic decisions and organisational performance. The central tenet of upper echelons perspective is that an organisation and its performance will be a reflection of its top managers (Abatecole et al., 2013; Carpenter et al., 2004; Hambrick & Mason, 1984), so it is anticipated that this conceptual perspective provides a suitable lens to examine the boardroom dynamics within corporate Australia. While a growing volume of studies continues to emphasise the broader capabilities of an executive management team on organisational strategy and performance only a few examine the important individual effects beyond the realm of executive experience and demographics on strategic choice (e.g. Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003; Carpenter et al., 2004).

Thus, by overlooking the link between members of the TMT and critical perspectives towards stakeholder management, previous studies have not been able to appreciate the role of marketing professionals, who constantly deal with and respond to stakeholder requirements, can play on boards. This study attempts to fill this void in the literature by building upon the organisational theories of upper echelons and stakeholder management in order to understand how senior marketing professionals can participate in strategic decision making in the executive suite. This will help to close the gap between what we know and what we need to know about boardroom composition (Carpenter et al., 2004) and through that ascertain the role that marketing can potentially play within the upper echelons of decision making in Australian organisations.

## **1.7 Chapter Conclusion**

The focus of this study is to understand why there is a distinct paucity of marketing professionals in executive positions within different types of organisations in Australia. The aim of the study is not merely to explore the empirical gap that exists in the extant literature but to understand the positioning of marketing within organisational structures. Largely,

the results from this study will assist organisations in understanding the value marketing brings to the executive table, and its subsequent impact on organisational performance. In addition, the results will contribute knowledge to stakeholder management and upper echelons theories. This thesis is divided into five chapters, as follows:

Chapter One introduces the topic at large, examining the significance of the research topic, its originality and fundamental research questions. In addition to introducing the key theoretical frameworks underpinning the study and related inquiring methods.

Chapter Two contains a review of the extant literature on the topic, strengthened by the relevant theories, the connection to marketing compositions within the organisation and subsequent potential to influence performance. It is through an extensive review of the literature that the research gaps are identified, providing the foundation for exploring the phenomenology under investigation. Literature on the reasons why marketing managers face an uphill battle in achieving executive level positions is considered. Followed by the passageways corporate elites travel on in order to anchor themselves firmly into the upper echelons of the organisation is examined and discussed.

Chapter Three provides a detailed account of the research methodology adopted in this study. Further providing justification for a qualitative methodology framed by a phenomenological paradigm within the interpretivist ontology. The areas that form the basis for the interview questions are drawn from the literature review and hence form the main thrust of the study. The choice of participants, accessibility and ethical considerations are also explained, and methods and tools used in the analysis of the data are justified.

Chapter Four details the analysis of the data, including the major themes identified and a hypothetical concept model is presented, inaugurating the basis of this study.

Chapter Five presents the conclusion of the thesis through an in-depth discussion of the findings. The discussion demonstrates to what extent existing theories are supported and extended, and how this contributes to a new understanding of the research topic. This chapter concludes with a discussion on the implications of the findings both in the practical and theoretical sense, along with its limitations and avenues for future research.

# Chapter 2 Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a literature review on significant academic theories, inclusive of upper echelons theory and stakeholder management theory are presented in exploring the role of marketing in today's executive boardroom, complete with a discussion on their applicability and prophecy in unlocking marketing's value in executive leadership teams. Consideration has been given to several key issues and themes that have previously been central to academic debate surrounding marketing's underrepresentation in the executive boardroom. For example, addressing the barriers marketing has faced in gaining acceptance in the boardroom as well as highlighting the opportunities and strategies marketers will need to develop over time, enabling them to be a serious boardroom contender.

Past research attempts to isolate the factors that contribute to marketing's value being understood and widely articulated within the organisation, leading to a position in its top management. However, a significant increase in marketing directors at the executive leadership table continues to be inconsequential and any real progress remains elusive (e.g. Gronroos, 2006; Nath & Mahajan 2008; Strandvik, et al., 2014). Executive leadership skills, attributes and qualifications are explored in this chapter in an effort to understand how the talent in the executive boardroom and the internal dynamics at play may enhance the impact of each individual and thus what implications the executive makeup may have on the organisation as a whole in its pursuit of its goals.

A consistent evolution in the literature is how marketing is readily understood within an organisation that will help to propel the discipline from the organisational fringes. This review concentrates on whether there has been a sea change in the essential skills needed in order to be an influential force in the C-suite and what specific skill sets marketing brings to the strategy table.

### 2.1.1 The Marketing Leadership Landscape

The sharks have been circling the arctic waters of academia, echoed in the channels of the business community. Both, it would seem hungry to make the marketing discipline their

next meal, deeming marketing's value as too far removed from the accepted corporate paradigm. Despite its historical past as a strategic discipline and a distinct management activity, marketing has apparently misbehaved so inappropriately it now finds itself a highly scrutinised business function (Clark et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Webster et al., 2003). Relinquished to the bowels of the organisation staring down structural inertia fighting for both position and budget (Clark et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Webster et al., 2003).

### **2.1.2 Challenges Faced in Gaining Acceptance in the Boardroom**

Several conclusions have emerged as to why marketing struggles in its bid to occupy a seat in the C-suite. The likes of Webster et al., (2005) and Klaus et al., (2014) assert marketing's fall from grace is largely due to its apparent inability to demonstrate its value in the boardroom. However, it would appear that how organisations create and capture value remains largely unmeasured and even misunderstood (Porter, 2010). Therefore, it is interesting that the marketing discipline has been singled out as the one function of the boardroom not capable of contributing to organisational value. Conceivably those organisations that 'create value' are in reality looking to solve strategic problems, in the pursuit of sustained competitive advantage. Furthermore, one would think that an organisations ability to define and measure what constitutes value is the key to understanding organisational performance and success (Strandvik et al., 2014, Porter, 2010). Thus, it is imperative to pay attention to how value is understood within the organisation.

As Hanssens and Pauwels (2016) suggest in their study, isolating the value that marketing brings to the organisation is a vexing challenge given the spectrum of different approaches to marketing. In practice, this represents a noteworthy concern and even a paradox as it has the potential to influence how marketing is presented to the organisation and thus practiced. As Strandvik et al., (2014) point out, how an organisation connects the dots between marketing and organisational value will shape the range of activities included under the notion of marketing. It could be argued that marketing's value is derived from its ability to generate cash flow through its adept proficiency in influencing levels of customer demand (Clark et al., 2013; Strandvik et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the longstanding contradiction is the impact of this demand on organisational performance. Once revenue is

generated, it becomes somewhat disputed territory as to the management function deserving of the credit (Clark et al., 2013). As Bennett (2009) suggests, the difficulties with quantifying the connections among marketing deeds, profitability and organisational performance is one of the most frequently cited reasons for an organisations averseness to appreciate the value that the marketing function can bring to the boardroom. Hence, the paucity of marketers being promoted to the C-suite continues (Baker & Holt, 2004; Doyle, 2000; Gray, 2004; McDonald, 2006). For example, it is difficult for marketing to justify to its boardroom counterparts (especially finance directors), assertions that a particular campaign has altered consumer feelings and/or purchasing patterns, and conversely the executive may not deem these type of attainments as worthwhile (Bennett, 2009; McDonald, 2006). As a consequent marketing, may be characterised as a cost rather than a vital long-term investment, which can positively influence organisational performance (Bennett, 2009).

It is evident from the literature that more attention needs to be given to a reliable and coherent set of frameworks and/or accountability measures that consider the management of an organisations intangible asset base (Wistow et al., 2012). For example stakeholder satisfaction, customer acquisitions, risk reduction, brand equity and the erection of revenue margins, all of which could be helpful in reengineering marketing's role as a strategic, value contributing resource in the upper echelons of the organisation (Ambler & Roberts, 2008; Drucker, 1993; Strandvik et al., 2014).

Scholars argue that marketing's contribution lies in its premeditated influence over significant organisational assets such as brand equity, stakeholder relationships and origins of cash flow (e.g. Ambler & Roberts, 2008; Drucker, 1993). However, the resurgence of scholars (Barroso-Castro et al., 2017; Homburg et al., 2015; Nath & Mahajan, 2008; Varadarajan, 1992; Weinzimmer et al., 2003) asserting the relationship between business performance and marketing remains mixed, has detrimental implications on cementing marketing's role in corporate strategy (Webster et al., 2003). In addition, other scholarly findings signifying the presence of CMOs have no impact on a organisations performance and those firms without one perform no better or worse than those with one (Nath &



Mahajan, 2008). Thus, cumulating in an uneasiness in academia and the business community as to the role of marketing leadership (Verhoef, et al., 2011). Previous works (e.g. Nath & Mahajan, 2008; Verhoef & Leeflang, 2009) on marketing's contribution to organisational performance and profitability remain inconclusive, with studies failing to provide convincing evidence of accountability and how the value marketing brings to the table contributes to organisational outcomes (Homburg et al., 2015; Verhoef & Leeflang, 2009). Consequently, concerns have been expressed about the role that marketing directors play in the boardroom (Morgan, 2012; Nath & Mahajan; 2008; O'Sullivan & Abela 2007).

Once more, the pretence that marketing is little more than a cost centre continues to engender pressure for marketers to demonstrate bottom line contributions (Park et al., 2012). Brand equity, perception and image are arithmetically difficult to calculate and a level of vagueness residues in assigning the correct metrics to the intangible elements in which marketing is renowned. As Azmet and Lakhani (2015) and Leahy (2011) posit it is not always easy to show how marketing has the desired impact on business performance compared to their fiscally trained counterparts. Yet it is this type of intangible yet strategic elements, which are difficult for other organisations to easily replicate and thus, provide a source of competitive advantage and contribute to organisational value (Strandvik et al., 2014). Interestingly, critics of marketing highlight its biggest weakness in gaining access to the boardroom is its inability to be accountable for its expenditure, with increased scrutiny for marketing to justify relative spend in relationship to return on investment (Nath & Mahajan; 2008).

Marketing accountability refers to the degree which marketing undertakings account for an organisations performance, both financial and non-financial metrics (Park, et al., 2012). However accountability is frequently measured yearly on a balance sheet and it is the non-financial metrics that perhaps need more investigation in terms of what boarder accountability measures organisations should be held to account. Particularly given that organisations today are not just judged on financial performance, but quadruple bottom line performance standards (e.g. Ambler & Roberts, 2008; Hadders, 2017; Hillebrand et al., 2015; Hillman et al., 2001). Paucity of empirical research on how marketing directors use

metrics for their marketing strategies and linking metric use to marketing performance (Verhoef & Leeflang, 2009) has meant that the marketing profession faces an uphill battle in gaining acceptance in the boardroom. It remains to be seen whether the ability to measure marketing performance has any actual effect on either organisational performance and/or marketing's stature within the organisation (Gilliatt & Cuming, 2017).

While return on investment is still considered a strong measure of business success, the intangible assets that provide the source of value and competitive advantage for organisations will be met with embittered resistance (Davies & Ardley, 2012; Morris et al., 2015). It is therefore not surprising that marketing is constantly being challenged to justify its existence, as the measures in which the discipline is commonly held to account are intangible and difficult to translate into diagnostic metrics (Homburg et al., 2015; O'Sullivan & Butler, 2010). Nevertheless, focusing on merely the financial performance of organisations has come under increased scrutiny (Engelen et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2015) with calls to look at broader measures of organisational effectiveness, such as correlating elements of board diversity with improved organisational performance and/or improvements in brand equity (Ambler & Roberts, 2008) and stakeholder relationships. In their study Germann et al., (2015) find organisations fiscally benefit from CMOs occupying a seat at the strategy table, they conjecture that without marketing, decisions are made that sacrifice intangible assets and long-term competitiveness for short-term profits (Doyle, 2000). Others (e.g., Feng, et al., 2015; Merlo & Auh, 2010), believe that the presence of the CMO raises the profile and importance of marketing in the boardroom and subsequently organisational performance is improved by bringing the customer into the executive suite. Further research may examine alternative measures of performance in the context of stakeholder value to extend current knowledge.

As Ambler and Roberts (2008) suggest evaluating marketing performance in the context of organisational value requires consideration of non-financial measures as well as the distinct differentiation between short-term and long-term performance metrics. Arguably, marketing is in the unique position, to champion their credentials in corporate responsibility in the executive suite, capitalising on marketing's inherent ability to elicit and gauge the

demands of multiple stakeholder groups, ensuring a stakeholder centric approach is adopted in boardroom decision-making. Thereby creating sustainable growth via an organisational commitment to generate superior value for its stakeholders (Carver, 2009; Knox, 2002). Other literature suggests that a fundamental part of the problem in the relationship between marketing and the board is that marketing doesn't talk the language of the boardroom (Morgan, 2012; O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007) and most members are finance focused and lack a perspective when it comes to marketing (McGovern et al., 2004).

This assertion would indicate that a significant amount of research has occurred beyond the threshold of the boardroom door which would substantiate this knowledge of internal boardroom language codes, which is contrary to what is currently available in the marketing literature given qualitative methodologies appear to be the dominant logic. Thus, prompting the question what is the language code that permeates the boardroom? However, as Sheth and Sisodia suggest (2005) marketing's absence in the executive suite may be more of a case of a blurred distinction between marketing and that of the marketers than its ability or inability to speak the favoured language of the boardroom. For example, rather than the discipline of marketing that is being marginalised, it is actually those responsible for it (Webster et al., 2003) which may be defensible if those responsible are unable to capture the benefits to the organisation of their efforts. In addition, the sheer absence of marketing at the apex of the organisation may subsequently circumvent and limit the understanding within an organisation as to its real importance in the boardroom (Gronroos, 2006). Implicit is the assumption that marketing needs to be represented at board level. Many academics continue to grapple with marketing's shortcomings (Schwarzkopf, 2011), but fail to present efficacious solutions. One might think that an obvious place to start might be who else is best placed to represent the needs of an organisations myriad of stakeholders at this level (Gronroos, 2006; Whelan et al., 2008). Perhaps it is even more elementary as suggested by Gronroos (2006), in that the answer lies in marketing, marketing. Evidently, it is how marketing is being defined and accepted by the corporate masses that is contributing to the ambiguity of the strategic role it can play (Gronroos, 2006; Nyberg, 2016).

Defining the role of marketing within the organisation is another hurdle the discipline needs to overcome in helping to escalate the importance the marketing discipline can and will play as a permanent fixture within the executive suite (Webster et al., 2003). However, it is not surprising that organisations have little appreciation of the full potential of marketing discipline, when the marketing arena itself is unclear (Gronroos, 2016, Nyberg, 2016). A patchwork of perspectives make it increasingly difficult for a consensus to be reached as to a suitable definition, one that can be used universally, particularly when it comes to documenting and articulating marketing's strategic elements (Baker & Holt, 2004). Further compounding the issue of defining the modern marketing remit is the discipline continues to suffer from misattributions, which leads to both the function and practice of marketing being criticised widely. For example, marketing is frequently the beneficiary of a tainted reputation as it is commonly perceived as being the discipline responsible for societal malevolence, from obstructing inboxes with spam and gimmicks through to encumbering cataleptic minds with messages of greed, sex, and status (e.g. Baker & Holt, 2004; Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Carver, 2009; Xu & Wyer, 2010). Therefore, the business environment continues to typecast the extent of marketing activities to the 4P's. Thus, marketing practitioners need to do more to dispel the misguided assumption that marketing's primary job is promotional puffery, building clear parameters surrounding what marketing is responsible for and what it can achieve strategically, particularly how it can underwrite as well as augment organisational performance (e.g. Mark & Ardley, 2017; Wind & Robertson, 1983; Xu & Wyer, 2010).

Conceivably, rebuilding the integrity and influence of marketing cannot be merely a normative statement made by scholars and/or marketing practitioners. Both will need to play an active role in initiating meaningful conversations between marketing and the executive leadership positions in order to help reconceptualise the marketing discipline, in a way that permeates the entire organisation. Thus, embedding marketing's strategic aspects and competence in not only articulating and advocating the interests of a myriad of stakeholders but perhaps even more importantly highlighting how meeting the needs of stakeholders align to the strategic imperatives of the organisation (e.g. Hillman et al., 2001; Klaus et al., 2014; McDonald, 2006; Preston & Donaldson, 1999). Moreover, while the

elimination of a CMO from the boardroom is notable, additional exertion is needed in facilitating the trajectory of the corporate marketing department to the boardroom (Webster, 2005). Thus, the time has come to adjudicate the differences in opinion in marketing's position in the upper echelons of the organisation. Removing the frustrations that occur between promise and practice by looking more broadly at the executive leadership landscape, unlocking the energies and harnessing the attributes of the top team that are perceived to contribute positively to organisational performance outcomes (e.g. Gronroos, 2016; Shahab et al., 2020).

### **2.1.3 Upper Echelons theory**

According to Doyle (2000), top management teams garner knowledge throughout the organisation and use this in the boardroom to isolate and cultivate strategic drivers that accelerate growth, increase profit margins and leverage investments, all of which are contributors to organisational performance. The financial, operational and legal disciplines appear both habitual and fervent contributors in the executive suite (Hillman et al., 2001; Miller & Triana, 2009; Rao & Tilt, 2016) each with the responsibility to report on how its functions performance impacts overall organisational success. In contrast marketing, arguably a formidable engine of research and innovation remains largely absent (Homburg et al., 2015). Now is the time to build credibility for marketing to secure the support needed to prioritise its investment in the C-suite.

Upper echelons literature is redolent in arguing for heterogeneous management teams detailing that the heterogeneity of a board that creates subtle differences in an organisations ability to handle the simultaneous and conflicting demands of refocusing the organisation strategically. Largely because decision-making is more effective when there is an increase in the diversity of perspectives, opinions and information sources (e.g. Abernathy et al., 2013; Cyert & March, 1963; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Nath & Mahajan, 2008; Wind & Robertson, 1983). Upper echelons theory is founded on the understanding that directors are independent thinkers who shape their organisations strategic direction through the lens of their own personal experiences, values and backgrounds (Barroso-Castro et al., 2017; Carpenter et al., 2004). While evident from past studies that no board should aspire to be dominated by a single viewpoint or discipline (Barroso-Castro et al.,

2017; Knox, 2002; Varadarajan, 1992; Wind & Robertson, 1983), disparity exists in organisations and their ability to let go of homogeneity in the quest to broaden board composition. Future research may elaborate on the concept of upper echelons theory to show that those organisations that increase the plurality of their boards by including marketing representatives, could improve their chances of success by bolstering the skill mix and suspending insularity (e.g. Barroso-Castro et al., 2017; Knox, 2002; Wind & Robertson, 1983).

Evidence substantiating the impact of marketing capabilities on organisational performance is scarce. Until recently, the synergy between marketing and other disciplines has been largely ignored (Verbeke & Tung, 2013). This presents an opportunity for further research on the impact of increased interdisciplinary knowledge on the board. This would see marketing harnessing synchronies with other disciplines such as finance and accounting in expanding its horizons to secure representation in the C-suite (Krush et al., 2013; Luo, et al., 2006; Strandvik, et al., 2014).

Boards will continue to make decisions whether or not marketing is at the table. Therefore, marketing must respond by justifying its unique contributions to organisational success to secure future investment in the boardroom. Marketing's inherent ability to navigate the complexities of stakeholder relationships may be the key that is urgently needed in unlocking its value in top level decision-making and influence on organisational triumph. As Tollin and Schmidt (2015) discuss, how an organisation is managed in the boardroom based on the differences between managers at this top level that may deliver the distinct difference between company performances. So one might suggest similarly to that of Strandvik et al., (2014) that by revealing what marketing is, and corresponding it to the manifestations of markets, opportunities and threats from the perspectives of others around the table, may positively influence how marketing is presented and subsequently practiced. Particularly if those at the table representing marketing can demonstrate, it is not one explicit pursuit but that it pervades the entire organisation (Strandvik, et al., 2014; Webster, 1992). The stark reality is marketing pedagogy may need to adapt to this proposed frontier.

There is little doubt that the differences that exist within executive ranks are the exact differences that can matter for upper echelon related outcomes and subsequent organisational performance (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The last several decades have authenticated an upwelling of interest in top executive diversity (e.g. Carpenter et al., 2004; Drucker, 1993). Hambrick and Mason's upper echelons perspective first published in 1984, sought to elucidate the principal in strategy as to why organisations differ. Driven by intellectual curiosity to uncover what makes one organisation more dominant and successful than the others, past research shows that concentrating on the influence of the particular characteristics and attributes of TMT's lead to superior performance (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989; Quttainah, 2015).

While upper echelons theory remains the dominant theoretical paradigm in TMT research less attention has been paid to the propensity for organisations to have certain compositions, providing organisations with the specific expertise in the areas that create the most value in augmenting performance (Bennett, 2009; Rao & Tilt, 2016; Tollin & Schmidt, 2015). In addition to how decision-making may be affected by specific backgrounds held by executive members. It is important to consider the impact of evolution, as change is pervasive and many potent forces come into play at different times, skills sets as well as external factors do not remain static.

Arguably, marketing in the TMT brings skills in being amenable to change, willing to take risks and seeking out strategies that are both innovative and creative. All of which may be explicitly linked to business growth (Whitler et al., 2018). The catch cry in today's organisations is the quest to concoct competitive advantage, so clearly marketing can play a role at all in the organisation. Interestingly, these associations have never been explicitly addressed in marketing's contribution to organisational value, yet marketing is still cited as the executive underdog (Whitler et al., 2018). Conversely, if organisational performance were to be explained by the strategic decisions made by the executives, it would be deemed unfair to portion blame to one discipline for an organisation's shortcomings. Thus, strategic decision-making is a reflection of the interaction between peers at this level (e.g. Cyert & March, 1963; Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989; Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Jensen & Zajac, 2004).

Further studies are needed to diminish the ambiguity that perseveres with respects to how to best measure the aggregate groups impact on organisational performance outcomes (Whitler et al., 2018). In addition to explicitly investigating the consequences of a marketing leaders personal attributes, ones that differ from non-marketing leaders on organisational decisions, actions and outcomes. Comparing them against other functional leaders, isolating the similarities and differences. Marketers' experience and knowledge are likely to be different from that of their peers in the TMT and this may affect organisational risk-taking and uncover a unique upper echelons relationship. Conceivably, as alluded to by Hillman and Dalziel (2003), the historic power and status of some disciplines may harvest dynamics that influence the relationships in the upper echelons. By default, imparting an unreasonable and unproportioned restriction on marketing's ability to influence organisational outcomes.

#### **2.1.4 Executive Attributes, Diversity and Decision-Making**

Past research has presented how the composition of personalities within the TMT can impart influence on the effectiveness of others within organisations and character by integrating traits into the vernacular of upper echelons literature. However, little has been done in encouraging theoretical connections amid the personalities residing in the TMT, strategic choice and organisational effectiveness (Bennett, 2009; Carpenter et al., 2004; Stewart, 2008). For example, is there a certain executive profile that is more amenable to large-scale organisational change or that can govern sustained performance during the maturation phase of a life cycle? In addition, to how a certain personality is likely to interact with others within the TMT. Broadening the exploration of executive personality profiles provides a promising research avenue for scholars and practitioners alike. Likely contributing to an augmentation in understanding the dynamics and interactions at play in within the TMT that ultimately play a pivotal role in shaping an organisations general direction (Gil et al., 2019; Qian et al., 2013).

In their study, Nielsen and Nielsen (2013) find that executive diversity positively influences organisational outcomes such as innovation and performance. However, empirical evidence remains mixed in highlighting a plethora of different personality traits, combinations and diversity within the TMT that can explain organisational performance (Nielsen, 2010a; Van



Knippenberg & Mell, 2016). Adding further nuance to our understanding of the 'black box' of TMT interactions and processes in relation to organisational success. The challenge for future studies will be to isolate the specific attributes executives bring to the table initially and to study how they continue to evolve to adopt new competencies and capabilities or interact with the other personality profiles around the table. Ensuring they are able to improve competitive positioning by keeping pace with a constantly changing landscape, that has no foreseeable end (Nielsen, 2010a; Nielsen, 2010b; Tuggle et al., 2010).

It is assumed in the literature that the TMT is responsible for inaugurating the strategic direction of the organisation and subsequently implementing selected strategies. Therefore, it may be said that creating the appropriate practices that inspire and nurture creativity and innovation at this level could be paramount to success. Evidently, organisational structures will vary widely including the number of positions and titles found within the C-suite. A growing stream of studies emphasise the importance of a team approach which considers the combined impact of those residing in the TMT on strategic choice, which is move away from structuring activities and responsibilities based on knowledge in explicit areas, reflected in more traditional hierarchical organisational structures (Carmeli & Tishler, 2006; Park et al., 2015).

Some interesting elements have emerged in recent studies that move beyond the anecdotal evidence of the number of positions and titles found in the TMT and include traits such as persuasive communication skills and extraversion as predictors of leadership that correlate to high organisational performance (Colbert et al., 2014). In their study, Carmeli and Tishler (2006) find that the ability of the TMT to execute virtuous choices that positively influence organisational performance is based on an executive's managerial skills, finding the people related skills of leadership are more important than intellectual abilities and qualifications. Thus, it is conceivable that the strategic demands at the TMT level mandates the collective skill and effort, more than one solitary leader can provide. Emphasising the importance of finding a complementary balance of behaviours between each leader inhabiting the TMT. Plausibly, there is a role for a disrupter or a devil's advocate in the TMT to avoid group think mentality. A premature phenomenon that occurs when a group such as the TMT make non-optimal decisions spurred by the urge to conform (Tubbe, 2010).

It is all good and well to nurture supportive and consensual decision-making to move things along; however is this really what today's organisations crave? In the quest for innovation and creative strategic options, to limit exploring all the alternatives for the sake of a quick fix. As Christensen et al., (2018) states, "creativity is important for firm success. The management team is required to use its creative skills to recognise the strategic alternatives made valid by developments in the marketplace and the capability and resources of the company" (p. 1051). Drawing on this, it would be fair to say that those in the TMT need to be at ease with the full strategic decision making process, being comfortable with uncovering previously unrecognised assumptions, challenging traditional conventions, closing doors on old strategies and opening doors to pursue new visions (Tubbe, 2010, Christensen et al., 2018).

As authors such as Fondas and Wiersema (1997), and Castanias and Helfat (1991) allude, it is the inherent managerial skills found around the table that play a key role in explaining the variation in organisational performance through their influence on strategic direction. One might suggest that now presents a golden moment for marketers to be at the heart of the executive boardroom. Helping organisations to seize the upside of disruption in the pursuit of growth and competitive advantage. Connecting their creativity and innate innovation to present previously unthought-of opportunities and strategies that bound ahead of the horizon and hence, the competition. Therefore, it is imperative to attract people to the TMT that can look at things differently, that are fully in touch with what stakeholders needs are, both internally and externally (Tubbe, 2010; Whitler, 2013). As Germann et al. (2015) suggest this may require a reimagining of the executive boardroom so that marketing becomes institutionally embedded.

TMT's are undoubtedly confronted with a bombardment of information, conflicting priorities and other constraints. One might suggest that every strategic choice or decision an executive team is faced with has a marketing aspect (Nyberg, 2016; Strandvik et al., 2014). A well-planned business strategy ought to include the value proposition, target consumer, internal competencies, and competitive strategy, and how the venture will make money (Morris et al., 2015), all of which is within marketing's scope. If the critical issues facing executive management teams are growth strategy and talent management,

marketing may be the central thread missing to sustainable, accountable growth (Nyberg, 2016; Strandvik et al., 2014). A structure with marketing at the zenith may have an outsized impact on the future success of an organisation.

### **2.1.5 Organisational Culture**

While organisations look to define the capabilities needed in their TMT to catapult them from success to significance, the impact of culture requires idiosyncratic attention when assessing the likelihood of sustained organisational success (Jones et al., 2007; Robbins & Coulter, 2013; Young et al., 2008). Robbins and Coulter (2013), define organisational culture as “The shared values, beliefs, or perceptions held by employees within an organisation” (p1.). Culture is collectively learned and the TMT plays a pivotal role in defining and transmitting these inherent organizational values, including what to do and what not to do, that they want absorbed throughout to drive the organisation forward. If marketing has a seat in the executive boardroom it may be more likely that there will be consistent narratives around the values, purpose and passion, that penetrate the entire organisation, aiding in cohesion and inspiring action to drive growth and success over the longer-term (Jones et al., 2007; Young et al., 2008).

Almost as if lead by the pied piper, employees are expected to be guided by the creed of the TMT. As Jones et al., (2007) suggest there is a need to deconstruct the thinking of those in the TMT to determine what they really pay attention to. Conversely, once an organisation’s culture emerges it will accentuate its position, practices and processes towards risk taking, engaging stakeholders and decision-making. Research suggests that stakeholders play a central role in the successful delivery of organisational strategy (Bourne, 2011). Several studies support the premise that organisational culture induces how an organisation will make decisions and manage its stakeholder relationships (e.g. Bourne, 2011; Clarkson, 1995; Jurgens et al., 2010). As Jones et al. (2007) posit organisations differ in their concerns for stakeholders with the variation reflected in their strategic choices, influenced by TMT thinking and behaviour. Thus, the literature calls for articulating a set of specific capabilities and corporate culture dynamics that organisations will need to avoid the tensions that may ascend from networks of multifaceted stakeholder (Day, 2011).

### **2.1.6 Stakeholder Management Theory**

Stakeholder management is yet another salient phrase discussed in the literature to describe what is essential in an organisations pursuit of optimal internal governance and competitive advantage (Kindstrom, 2010; Verbeke et al., 2018). Corporate reputation is increasingly understood as a function of how an organisation treats its stakeholders, a prototype of good management (Jurgens et al., 2010). Despite the nature of what constitutes a stakeholder being highly contested within some scholarly circles (e.g. Fassin, 2009; McDonald, 2006; Miles, 2012). Freeman (2010, p.46) is recognised as introducing the concept of stakeholder theory to academic debate, defining stakeholders as “Any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives”. Contending organisations must balance the pursuits of all stakeholders, transcending answerability to shareholders exclusively (Clarkson, 1995; Freeman, 2010). The very process of addressing the interests of all stakeholders is one that requires delicacy and one that fundamentally depicts an organisations potential to achieve long-term success. It may even be said that organisations that lack the aptitude to satiate its myriad of stakeholders risk ruin.

As Hillebrand et al., (2015) suggest, stakeholder theory postulates a framework for how organisations should conduct business and that by being considerate and attentive to multiple stakeholder groups has the potential to protect resources, (both tangible and intangible) that generate organisational value. Some studies, such as posited by Signitzer and Prexl (2007) demonstrate that organisations that pay attention to multiple stakeholders perform better than those that do not. As suggested by Verbeke & Tung (2013), devoting the appropriate attention to all stakeholder groups is imperative in realising and maintaining superior performance (Hillebrand et al., 2015; Signitzer & Prexl, 2007; Homburg et al., 2015; Sisodia et al., 2007). The way an organisation manages and responds to this overarching web of relationships and consequential isomorphic pulls could very well be deemed a value creating strategy in and of itself, a cost effective way to erect barriers and preserve profits, preventing others from easily imitating, leading to a stronger competitive position. Conversely, those organisations that fail to meet the expectations of stakeholders jeopardise their credibility, reputation, knowledge, not to mention their revenue potential,

due to loss of revenue through community boycotts (Verbeke & Tung, 2013). For these reasons organisations must invest in core competencies, resources and management practices, such as marketing that are adroit at collaboration and communication.

Marketing has long been known as ambidextrous, a mastery of connections, the facilitator of relationships embedded into their DNA (Bennett, 2009). However, marketing research has largely ignored an organisation's relationships with non-customer stakeholders, remaining single minded on the customer relationship (Berry, 1995). Customer experience has been found to be a potent driver of growth, with calls for further research into the existence and interplay of an extended number of stakeholders, effectively initiating the notion of stakeholder marketing, to transcend past studies that focus on one stakeholder group in isolation (Bhattacharya & Korschun, 2008; Gronroos, 1990; Payne and Frow, 2005).

### **2.1.7 Stakeholder Management and Marketing**

Hult et al., (2011) further embraces the notion of stakeholder marketing describing it as the "activities within a system of social institutions and processes for facilitating and maintaining value through exchange relationships with multiple stakeholders" (p.57). Hillebrand et al., (2015) also acknowledges that stakeholders are interconnected and can easily be motivated by relationships with other stakeholders groups. Therefore, it is an organisation's ability to understand this assortment of networks and how they may influence each other to create value for the organisation. The marketing discipline have long been accustomed to looking in the peripheral, beyond the customer as the principal stakeholder and may play a role in sensitising other executives to do the same, which may pave the way for an increased acceptance of marketing's presence in the executive boardroom (Verhoef & Leefland, 2009; Webster & Lusch, 2013). Executives braced with an amplified understanding of how stakeholders operate in the totality of the organisation ensure better alignment of strategic decisions (Gummesson, 2008), which subsequently has the potential to impart increased organisational performance. Further research should look to evolve the stakeholder marketing perspective, insulating the associated capabilities so that it fast becomes a dominant logic within an organisations arsenal. Doing so, may well be the pledging avenue marketing has been looking for to oppress the pool of academics

that believe marketing is losing relevance in today's organisations (e.g. Carver, 2009; Gilliat & Cuming, 2017; Smith et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2003).

### **2.1.8 Why Marketers are needed in the Executive Boardroom?**

In the corporate environment executives are charged with a series of trade-offs and come under intensifying pressure and scrutiny from a myriad of stakeholders to make sound decisions, underpinned by a respectable awareness of appropriate alternatives and making judgements that positively impact the organisation (Olson et al., 2007). According to scholars such as Carter and Spence (2014), Bennett (2009) and Olson et al., (2007) strategic choice is about understanding the gap that may exist between where an organisation is now and what it wants to become, continually building organisational capacity to get there. Marketing activities play a key role in the strategy formulation process. As previous studies (e.g. Bennett, 2009; Carpenter et al., 2004) have concluded, the strategically important customer, competition and competitiveness are all aspects of marketing and arguably the underpinnings of organisational excellence. Consistent with these findings, Bennett (2009) and Wistow et al., (2012) find organisational performance is enhanced by aligning stakeholder interests with strategic goals. Thus, separating the strategies an organisation pursues from the individuals in the TMT making decisions may lead to corporate misdeed, which in turn could handicap the firm's growth potential and any reservoirs of goodwill.

Marketing arguably brings a unique point of difference to the table that other parts of the organisation cannot access, drawing on its breadth and depth of diversified stakeholder relationships. Its ability to be nimble in gleaming intricacies and insights provide marketing a wide-ranging comprehension of all pertinent stakeholders, their interests, and relationships more than any other member of the TMT. Therefore, it may be said that marketing is an indispensable strategic tool, one that organisations cannot afford to be absent from the C-suite. Taking a position at the table may be the missing part of the equation that organisations have been looking for in consolidating and cementing competitive positioning. It could be said that marketing is not merely a useful resource it's a competitive necessity, a modelling mechanism of stakeholder attentiveness that will lead to synergistic gains in the communities an organisation finds itself orbiting (e.g. Carpenter et al., 2004; Stewart, 2008).

As suggested by Nyberg (2016) marketing directors need to actively participate in strategy discussions and provide continual substantiation of how the effects of the marketing remit influence organisational results to regain members of the top management team's trust (Bennett, 2009). Thus, the recipe for marketing's success in the boardroom is its ability to possess a strategic mindset combined with the proficiency to execute strategy and articulate the connection between strategy and evidenced outcomes. Consequently, members of the TMT need a good understanding of what is going on in the trenches so they can determine whether a strategy is correct. This may require members of the executive to shift their experiences, and to behold marketing not through the habitual and arguably outdated lens, but through the lens of what constitutes marketing today. Marketing needs to play a critical role in stepping up and showing the TMT what's possible, as Homburg et al; (2015); Stewart, (2008) and Verbeke and Tung, (2013) suggest marketing drives business forward, via its strategic agility to stride away from the status quo, support innovation, manage strategic challenges and thus, cementing competitive advantage.

Marketing in the context of stakeholder value creation might be the lynchpin needed to reclaim lost territory, specifically the explicit recognition that its presence in the boardroom is positively associated with improved growth, corporate governance and organisational performance (Balmer & Greyser, 2006).

#### **2.1.9 Short-Term Agility, Cost Containment and Long-Term Growth Prospects**

As previously mentioned, stakeholder management theory surpasses board accountability to solely shareholders, offering an alternative approach to corporate governance, which seeks to balance the interests and relationships with a broader range of stakeholders to improve organisational performance (Balmer & Greyser, 2006; Weinzimmer et al., 2003). Therefore, if marketing can take ownership of the company's most sacred resources, the stakeholders, it will automatically manifest itself as a strategic imperative that is discussed in the boardroom. Going somewhat of the way in dissolving the barriers that seemingly exists between operational specialities (Hillman et al., 2001). Building strong stakeholder relationships takes time and as many scholars attest, one of the greatest threats facing marketing is a single mindedness emphasis on short-termism (e.g. Nikolov, 2018; Saboo et al., 2016). Organisations are quick to use well-developed financial measures to gauge

performance as they can promptly ascertain what is delivering quantifiable returns (Currim et al., 2012; Nikolov, 2018).

A key element of marketing's strategy into the C-suite should be directed at communicating the value stakeholder relationships bring to the organisation and how they can be measured. As Ittner and Larcker (2009), allude, it is common for organisations to steer into inertia when non-financial performance measures such as those that dispense for stakeholder performance are in their embryonic stages. Nonetheless as Kotter (2008) suggests relationships with stakeholders can significantly influence an organisation's success, asserting 'stakeholder oriented organisations reported four times the growth in sales than those organisation's whose main priority was maximising shareholder wealth' (p.72). Marketing needs to stand up and show their C-suite colleagues how stakeholder relationship management can help eschew organisational pitfalls of failing to invest early and adequately in relationships for the sake of outcome indicators that are retrospective, observable and verifiable at the expense of responding to what stakeholders not only want but also expect.

Marketing budgets become an easy target when organisations are deploying strategies of cost containment. As the saying goes, you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs; similarly short-term cost cutting destroys rather than builds organisational value. Marketing is under increasing pressure to deliver with limited access to appropriate resources and budget at the expense of long-term brand health. Marketing discipline needs to take action to present a stalwart case to organisations for investment, demonstrating the material contribution that the value of stakeholder relationships and other intangible assets bring to the organisation and how they can influence corporate performance (Nikolov, 2018).

#### **2.1.10 Asset Intangibility**

How an organisation interacts and subsequently responds to the environment in which it operates has been the focus of much of the academic literature (Dutton & Jackson, 1987). What is less studied is how an organisation expends its intangible asset base as a differentiator of advantage (Green & Ryan, 2005). Previously, economic factors such as price were thought to establish competitive advantage, yet when products become



commodities, elements such as price lose importance as a driver of advantage, and thus, the competitive landscape is levelled. Therefore, advantage is more probable from an accumulation of intangible assets such as brand awareness, reputation and social capital. In line with Green and Ryan (2005) the underpinnings of value creation are shifting from tangible assets to intangibles ones and in addition it is not merely the existence of certain resources, but their usefulness when appropriated advantageously which provides a source of organisational success (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993).

The relative importance of intangible assets in an organisations effort to create value constitutes an important and currently understudied opportunity for marketing and its role in creating this needed value positioned at the helm of the TMT. Research has continued to show that an organisations reputation is an important determinant of organisational success, making links to intangible resources such as customer satisfaction, loyalty and brand equity (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012). Hence, organisational rethinking of a brand as an asset that has value and can generate future profits is perhaps one of the most influential ideas in marketing scholarly circles. Marketing may very well be the resource that is currently missing from an organisation's TMT, with the means to deliver an improved understanding of value creation.

## **2.2 Research Gap**

The theories discussed in this chapter have laid the foundation for the analysis of data, which have highlighted a gap that exists between why marketing plateaus and other disciplines succeed in gaining a seat in the executive boardroom. Past research has based their findings largely on quantitative data, which fails to identify and conceptualise the issues that marketers may be faced with when seeking progression to the executive boardroom. The current study is used to develop a deeper understanding of marketing's positioning in organisations through the phenomenology of the lived experience of those residing in the executive boardroom.

Results from extant literature appear to concentrate on financial metrics to examine marketing's performance in the executive boardroom. The contention is financial measures are not the only way to assess performance and other key metrics such as brand equity,

customer loyalty and stakeholder management need to be considered in evaluating CMO performance. Evidence substantiating the impact of marketing capabilities alone on organisational performance is scarce and conceivably incomplete. This study investigates the specifics of organisational performance measures in the context of marketing's paucity in executive management positions. Past studies have largely failed to consider marketing's interaction with other members of the TMT in influencing strategic choice and thus performance. It would appear not one discipline in the executive suite could be made accountable for performance and for that reason, it is important to broaden the unit of analysis from the individual CMO to the small constellation of executives that reside in the executive boardroom that provides for variance in organisational performance.

This study will examine upper echelons and stakeholder management theories in considering the relationship between TMT and corporate performance. It is expected that the analysis of data regarding marketing's role in the executive boardroom, the challenges and opportunities for career progression and how marketing contributes to organisational performance will enable a deeper comprehension as to the paucity of marketers in the C-suite, the value marketing brings to the executive boardroom and its subsequent impact on organisational performance.

The following research questions form the basis for the study:

1. What are the reasons that marketing continues to be under-represented in today's executive boardroom?
2. What can marketing practitioners do in order to improve their chances of becoming members of the top management team and play an important role therein?
3. Can marketing directors in the executive boardroom influence organisational performance?

### **2.3 Chapter Conclusion**

The underpinnings of this study is based upon upper echelons theory and stakeholder management theory because a key element relevant to marketing's progression to the

boardroom is an organisation's position on stakeholder management and those residing around the C-suite table. An extensive component of the literature review was the challenges marketers have faced in gaining admission to the executive boardroom. The challenges ranged from accountability, the role marketing plays within the organisation and perceived value, to not talking the language of the boardroom. Shedding light on the paucity of marketers in today's executive boardroom required understanding the perspectives of those residing in the upper echelons of an organisation, their personal capabilities and attributes and how the TMT make decisions that subsequently influence organisational performance. Another important component of the review was addressing the opportunities for marketing to progress to the executive boardroom by articulating its value and contribution to organisational performance. In the next chapter, an appropriate methodology for use in this study will be developed in detail.

# Chapter 3 Research Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research methodology adopted in this study. It includes explicit details as to the design, sample and methods employed, providing justification for each choice. Of which the ontological and epistemology beliefs of the researcher are significant elements. In addition to the nature of the research problem that arbitrates the board approach taken. Thus, ensuring the research methodology is harmonious with the research goals and philosophical assumptions (Liamputtong, 2013; Saunders et al., 2007). The intention of this study is to gain an understanding of the barriers experienced by marketers in occupying a seat in the C- suite. Hence, a methodological framework was needed that was concerned with deepening the understanding of a range of human experiences and the meanings attached by those in executive management roles. In undertaking a study that is concerned with the creation of knowledge, researchers direct their attention to how to obtain knowledge. Ensuring the most cogent ways are applied to reach the truth (Liamputtong, 2013; Saunders et al., 2007). Recognising and acknowledging the relationship between the researcher and that of reality. Reflecting on their position as a researcher, researchers either assume a position of distance or recognise their inclusion in the province, and in producing the final study (Liamputtong, 2013). As suggested by Moon and Blackman (2014), this leads to specific choices that influence the purpose, design, methodology and methods of the research, as well as to analysing and interpreting the data.

This research adopts phenomenology as the qualitative methodology to gain further insights as to why there is a paucity of marketers in the C-suite. Phenomenology is an interpretive research paradigm, viewing the phenomena as it is experienced by individuals, which is unique to them (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Consequently, the design of this study is fashioned on an interpretive ontology and a social constructivist epistemology. Both of these are integral to investigating the lifeworld views of those in executive management to generate a contextual understanding. Thus, creating

knowledge of marketing's impact in the boardroom through the reality that is understood and experienced by the individual (Moon & Blackman, 2014), which was deemed essential to articulate the complexities surrounding marketing's presence in the boardroom (Liamputtong, 2013; Saunders & Townsend, 2018).

This chapter has been divided into five sections. First, the philosophical foundations of the study will be elucidated, which then translates into the qualitative research methodology that is detailed in the subsequent section. This is followed by an in depth discussion of the research design and process. Which also includes actions taken to ascertain analytical rigor and validity of the data. The fourth section details the analysis and the processes involved in interpreting and assigning meaning to the data collected to answer the research questions. Final section provides a brief summary of the chapter.

### **3.2 Interpretivist Ontology and Social Constructivist Epistemology**

Ontology marks the commencement of all research. At the most rudimentary level ontology seeks knowledge to answer specific questions. It is the study of what exists for people to know about and how individuals come to understand and find truth in their being (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2020). A philosophy of reality, ontology is concerned with the social reality of the way things are (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). This social reality can be understood in many different ways, as it is largely dependent on how an individual perceives the world. Epistemology follows, as the relationship between the researcher and the reality. It is how a researcher approaches uncovering knowledge and thus how reality is seized (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). These philosophical perspectives are closely entwined, as they underpin the assumptions researchers make about their research. It is important, as research can only be meaningfully understood and interpreted when there is clarity about the decisions that are being applied (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Liamputtong, 2013).

In exploring the idea of ontology and epistemology and the role both play in guiding the research inquiry, an important consideration is the diverse ways that exist to seek knowledge (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). In the social sciences there are two dominant paradigms to gaining knowledge, positivism and interpretivism, both differ in their

ontological, epistemological, and methodological aspects (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Saunders et al., 2006). On one hand, the positivist paradigm holds a realist position and assumes a single, objective reality exists independently of what individuals perceive. According to Saunders et al., (2007) positivism assures “Unambiguous and accurate knowledge to produce law like generalisations” (p.135). It emphasises data and facts that are measurable and not influenced by any human interpretation.

In contrast, interpretivism rejects only one reality exists as individuals perceive, create and attach meanings, to help them make sense of their worlds, which will vary between individuals (Liamputtong, 2013). Therefore, the knowledge attained is a social construct, rather than objectively determined. As Hudson and Ozanne (1988) and others suggest, interpretivists deem that no amount of investigation will converge on a single reality, multiple realities will exist because of the difference in individual perspectives that help to fashion meaning (Liamputtong, 2013). It is in understanding these paradigmatic assumptions and the purpose of the research that the interpretivist ontology and constructivist epistemology are adopted to discuss reality in the subsequent sections. Demonstrating the impact of these assumptions on the research process, including how knowledge is viewed and the methodological strategies used in uncovering it (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

### **3.2.1 Interpretivist Ontology**

The current study is concerned with uncovering an untold insight into the lived experiences of those in executive management and the perceptions they hold of the marketing discipline. This is supported by an interpretive paradigm as it allows for a richer inquiry that creates new understanding and meanings based on the perspectives of different people from a diverse range of backgrounds and organisations. Arguably, a Chief Customer Service Officer, CEO and Marketing Director will all experience different workplace realities that will be unique to them (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). These realities as Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest are contingent on the interaction with others and the environment that surrounds them. Therefore, it is reasonable to be cautious of any interpretation that asserts a solitary explanation.

Given an incongruity exists globally as to why there is a paucity of marketers in TMT, it was important to understand the social context of the phenomena. Allowing the data to emerge, with underlying meanings being driven by the participants and their experiences (Morgan, 2012). Thus, a qualitative approach was considered most appropriate in exploring the lived experiences of TMT members in enlarging and deepening the understanding of the data that transpired, as no two responses are the same, enhancing the richness of the inquiry. This cannot be attained in a quantitative study as lived experience is considered a separate reality (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

As the essence of the current study is concerned with gathering human insight into the interactions and personal encounters in the boardroom and avoids rigid frameworks it deviates from positivism. Previous positivism research has relied on quantitative studies, which have been unsuccessful in delivering unanimous reasons as to why we are witnessing a decline in marketing leadership. While positivism depends heavily on statistical probability and building on established theories and hypotheses through deductive analysis, it sacrifices the investigation of themes that may emerge from the raw data. It was critical in this study to adopt an open and flexible research structure, allowing the data to tell the story, in which themes and concepts are then derived (Carson et al., 2001). Consequently, the current research employs mainly an inductive approach. This was important given the complexity and unpredictability associated with human interaction and the nature of perceived reality (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). In addition, it allows unexpected phenomena to be revealed through participant narration while the researcher remains open to building new knowledge throughout the course of the study (Liamputtong, 2013).

### **3.2.2 Social Constructivist Epistemology**

This study is concerned with qualitative inquiry, seeking in-depth knowledge of social reality, as others understand it (Liamputtong, 2013). Two theoretical stances exist when considering epistemology, constructivism and social constructivism. It is important to differentiate between both perspectives to distil any confusion. As both share the notion of multiple realities and embrace the postmodern idea that knowledge and reality is subjective

(McLeod, 1996). Constructivism as an epistemology holds, that the only reality we can know is one represented by how an individual constructs meaning and gives thought within pre-existing social systems (Hunter & Krantz, 2010). For constructivists the emphasis is on the personal experiences. Meaning and knowledge are created by what is observed by the individual, in their minds (Jonassen, 1991). The reality is therefore constructed through a person's active experience of it.

In contrast, social constructionists, compose knowledge and their reality through culture and conversations. They focus on what's happening between people, the language and the stories, connecting the social interactions to create realities (Gergen & Gergen, 1991) thus, the focus is not on the individual person per say. Rather knowledge is built through the contextual conversations experienced, taking into consideration various external and cognitive factors. For example social and situational elements (Schleiber & Valle, 2013). As Galbin (2014) posits, "The mode of relating we have to other, is taught by our culture and society; all the metaphysical quantities we take for granted are learned from others around us" (p.84). Given individual viewpoints are extrapolated from prevailing normative and cultural cognitive pillars within organisations, it was important to reflect on the external forces that also impact on the individuals lived experience.

This research was concerned with uncovering the various meanings and revealing the complexities, associated with marketing's absence in the C-suite. Investigating the way marketing has previously been delineated, using qualitative inquiry to allow for new possibilities, meanings and perspectives to be explained. Individual stories grounded in a person's lived experience were largely absent from the literature. Thus, the researcher was encouraged to exploit the scarcity on marketers in the C-suite. With eminence on the inclusion of multiple realities and personal stories. Further highlighting the significance of social interactions and the role of culture play in creating knowledge (Pasher & Ronen, 2011).

As the purpose of this research was to instigate discussion, interest and understanding as to marketing role in today's organisations, not to gather facts, a framework was needed that allowed the researcher flexibility to create a space of understanding. One in which the



researcher was able to reflect on her own past experiences, learnings and personal bias in entering into dialogue with participants. A social constructionist framework, accepts the equal engagement of research participant and researcher as co-creators of a shared reality (Liamputtong, 2013). This does not suggest that social constructionism is a more superior theory than others are but it is deemed the most appropriate theory for this specific study.

The principal assumptions of social constructionism discussed above form the epistemological basis for the study. Hence, it informed the researcher's discernments in defining the core focus and intentions of this study, in devising the method, and in describing the research participant. It is important to note that the assumptions the researcher has achieved are merely the understanding that she has obtained after a thorough journey of investigating and exploring the phenomenon. In addition, the elucidations of the concepts in this chapter should be considered as the researcher's unique punctuation of perspectives and certainly not as the only way of expressing them. Social constructionists embrace the postmodern idea that not all interpretations of reality hold equal validity. Consequently, the views of the researcher are just one plausible composition of 'reality' (Liamputtong, 2013).

### **3.3 Methodology: Qualitative Research, Exploration and the Researchers Role**

Research methodologies are commonly catalogued into either qualitative or quantitative. The difference between the two continue to cause divide in scholarly circles, pertaining to the relative value of each method (Andrade, 2009; Neuman, 2014). Essentially the differences of each approach may be best described in terms of the conceptualisation of constructs such as reality, truth, knowledge and objectivity. The likes of Corbin and Strauss (2014) and Carson et al., (2001) for example, characterise qualitative research as an in-depth examination of social and cultural phenomena, involving subjective and descriptive language. In which reoccurring themes can and are identified from individual experiences. While Stiles (1993), describes quantitative design as the examination of numbers and facts, investigating broad trends that can be generalised across populations. They concern themselves with finding universal truths, answering the 'why's' (Stiles, 1993). In contrast, qualitative researchers place emphasis on making sense of stories, within the milieu and

perspective of the individuals experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). The research questions in this study were concerned with finding out as much as possible, in particular the 'what's', to gain knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences (Anosike et al., 2012). Which according to Stiles (1993) it is the 'What' questions that provoke descriptive material of which participants have undeviating knowledge and hence are more conducive to storytelling.

As the focus of this study was on exploring the lived experiences of those in executive management and developing an in-depth understanding of how they perceive marketing and the role it plays in today's organisations, it necessitated an approach that fitted with the aims and intentions of the researcher. A qualitative design was not only consistent with the researchers epistemology of social constructivism, it allowed for the understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon in a naturalistic setting to be described by individual participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Galbin, 2014;). In addition to identifying themes that emerged from individual experiences, it allowed for more detailed insights to be garnered, to generate new, unique knowledge, that otherwise would not of been able to be obtained through percentages and statistics (Stiles, 1993).

### **3.3.1 Exploratory Research**

In exploring the challenges that marketers face in gaining acceptance in the boardroom, focusing the understanding in the given social setting an exploratory approach was taken. Primarily this study was initiated and motivated by drawing on the authors lived experiences that a sense that something was out of place in today's executive leadership makeup. This required a much closer investigation of relationships and dynamics within organisations, to gather information based on human interactions and perspectives. The aim was to establish why marketing ascends only so far in the corporate hierarchy, whereas other disciplines are seemly capitulated into their C-suite seat. Exploratory research allowed for the fresh interpretation and discovery of why a paucity of marketers in the executive boardroom exists. Subsequently qualifying and reflecting on recurring themes and patterns that could be used to generate theory and/or a conceptual framework to be built on in future studies

(Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Carlson, 2010; Creswell, 2013).

This study held no explicit expectations when investigating if marketing had been marginalised in the boardroom. Rather it was concerned with learning what was going on, how participants in the setting under question got along, gave meanings to their actions, as well as identifying issues of concern. In order to extend these understandings into themes and lastly a conceptual framework, which can be used to not only rationalise but also predict outcomes associated with particular TMT compositions, an exploratory approach was considered imperative (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Carlson, 2010; Creswell, 2013).

### **3.3.2 Researcher's Role**

The qualitative researcher's status and positionality has come under scrutiny in the past. Largely because of the active role they play in the qualitative inquiry, drawing on their own experiences, interacting with study participants to access their thoughts and feelings while acknowledging their own assumptions and biases. Ensuring neutrality and objectivity by remaining cognisant of prior knowledge and dispositions and taking action to control them (Carson, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, while the researcher is viewed as the primary instrument for data collection they are predominantly concerned with participants being able to speak for themselves, providing their own perspective on the phenomenon in a naturalistic setting (Carson, 2010). As opposed to a quantitative study where the data is mediated through an instrument that is independent of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative researchers immerse themselves in a setting, which is familiar to the study participant, asking probing questions to go deeper into conversations in order to develop a unified, holistic understanding and to comprehend reoccurring themes in the experience as a whole. Rather than as separate, arbitrary statements of text (Carlson, 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Thus, the researcher is a crucial component in fashioning an environment where participants are able to express their experiences. In doing so, the researcher must have sufficient comprehension of the participants understanding of the phenomenon, to gain enough data to derive meaningful interpretation. Furthermore, the multidimensional nature of qualitative research enables meaningful, in-depth insights to be

deprived that otherwise would not be accessible. Whilst allowing the researcher the flexibility to set the scene in the collection, analysing and interpretation of the data (Carslon, 2010; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In an attempt to understand why marketing is not ascending to the executive boardroom, a qualitative research approach was chosen as the methodology. Not only does this approach ascribe to the discovery of understanding human interactions in context, it is consistent with the epistemological assumptions of social constructionism (Galbin, 2014; Neuman, 2014).

### **3.4 Research Design – Phenomenology**

Comprehending the complexities within an organisation and associated management practices necessitates a worldview that summons an intense examination of just how individuals assign meanings to their everyday behaviours and experiences, in a host of native situations and environments (Liamputtong, 2013). Particularly, given the intractable junction the discipline of marketing finds itself. Fundamentally fuelled by competing, multiplicity of views on marketing's role and place in the organisation both in academia and in practice. An approach was needed that investigated how individuals in the upper echelons experience and understand the marketing phenomenon. The diverse types of descriptions used by different organisational members to narrate their experiences, not only creates opportunities to learn from, but also provides rich insight into how marketing is understood and experienced in practice (Hopkinson & Hogarth-Scott, 2001). Hence, this research is founded on the methodological position of Phenomenology.

Situated in the lifeworld phenomenological studies begin by uncovering common themes and new meanings from questioning the lived experiences of participants in an attempt to gain an understanding of the complexities and deeper knowledge of the totality of life, as seen and experienced by the participant (Anosike et al., 2012; Crewswell, 2013; Liamputtong, 2013). Phenomenology diverges from other approaches due to its emphasis on the meaning experienced by the participant rather than just on a description of their observed behaviours (Anosike et al., 2012). Its very nature is subjective, as it describes the

phenomena in the world as seen by others. As the study evolves, the aim is not to simplify the complexities, rather continually build meaning from variations as they emerge, as each individual experiences the phenomenon (Crewswell, 2013). Thus, phenomenology in relation to this study offers the greatest potential to extend and/or re-orient what is currently known about marketing and its position within organisations, as experienced and understood by those in the executive arena (Anosike et al., 2010).

In phenomenological research, there are two major approaches, transcendental and hermeneutic. The role of the researcher is the key distinguishing aspect between the two. While transcendental employs bracketing, to separate out the subjective experiences of the researcher. Hermeneutic phenomenology recognises that the researcher cannot separate from their lifeworld. In its place, the researcher openly acknowledges previous experiences and preconceptions and this awareness and/or knowledge acts as beneficial guide in the analysis process (Crewswell, 2013). It may be argued that phenomenologists cannot be isolated from their own presumptions and to feign an unprejudiced approach to the data is contradictory to phenomenology's philosophical core. After all, the researcher understands that provides the leading light in deeming a particular phenomenon commendable of investigation in the first instance (Giorgi, 2009).

Phenomenology was considered the most appropriate approach in improving awareness and a sense of understanding about organisational marketing provisions in terms of meaning, the impact marketing has on organisational life and management related practices as they occur and are experienced in practice. As it is a complex phenomenon, it would be an injustice to declare a restrictive, one size fits all, and generalised theories as to why marketing fails to occupy a seat in the boardroom. In this sense, there was scope and much merit in breaking free from this limited lens of outlandish objectivity. Questioning existing ways of seeing and looking afresh at an empirical investigation, authenticating marketing as an intellectual endeavour in the boardroom.

### **3.5 Unit of Analysis**

In accessing the consciousness of participants to derive comprehension from the data such

as recognising patterns to make sense of what is shared, it is necessary to retain context so that reasonable meanings can be acquired and analysed across cases. The sample in this study comprised of those in senior management positions, with diverse disciplinary backgrounds from organisations in Australia. Twelve participants contributed to the study, ten executive managers and two senior managers, of which eight were males and four females in the sectors of health, banking, environment, mining and community. Drawing on the insights and specific experiences of this cohort to allow concepts to emerge, a meaningful picture of the dynamics in Australian boardrooms was created without compromising the richness and dimensionality (Anosike et al., 2012).

### **3.6 Reliability, Validity and Generalisability**

Fundamental concepts of validity, reliability, and generalisability are just as applicable to qualitative research as they are in quantitative research, despite qualitative research being disparaged in the past for lacking legitimacy (Noble & Smith, 2015). Given qualitative studies are centred on understanding meanings and interpreting people's subjective experiences, this makes it more difficult to determine a yardstick to assess its reliability and validity (Liamputtong, 2013). Despite these challenges, qualitative studies are now widely recognised as a legitimate, robust tool in managing non-numerical material. While subsequent phenomenological interpretation, which indissolubly bond with human senses, context and subjectivity has fuelled the relentless polemics. Qualitative enquiry invariably adds dimensions that enrich the corpus of findings - which in this study was considered essential in advancing existing knowledge, and offering the greatest potential to impact and reshape the marketing discipline within organisations (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 1999).

Research rigour is fundamentally what provides the confidence that a study is worthwhile, contributes to knowledge, and is more than an idealistic, fictional narrative (Corbin & Strauss; 2014; Creswell, 2013; Liamputtong, 2013). Rigour as described by Liamputtong (2013) refers to "the quality of the qualitative enquiry and is used as a way of evaluating qualitative research" (p.24). Many strategies can be employed to safeguard the rigour of a qualitative study and these form an essential part of a research methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In that regard, reliability, validity, triangulation, and generalisation will now be

discussed to demonstrate the credibility of findings.

### **3.6.1 Reliability**

Reliability denotes the methods employed to ensure consistency and stability of findings. For example, if another researcher were to reproduce the study they would reach comparable findings (Liamputtong, 2013; Riege, 2003). However, as discussed previously qualitative research retains the view that reality is socially constructed by the individual. Therefore, the very uniqueness of an individual's perspective compound the challenge of replication, in justifying reliability (Liamputtong, 2013; Rolfe, 2006). Hence, a periphery of variability in results should be expected and accepted, provided a uniformity exists in the methodology (Lincoln, 1998). It is important to acknowledge that while the statistical methods used in a quantitative study may prove problematic in measuring findings in a qualitative study, findings can still be interpreted. Thus, additional criteria can be applied to certify the 'truthiness' of findings and to arbitrate the virtues of qualitative enquiry (Liamputtong, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the following four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, to assist in establishing rigour and reliability. According to Ramcharan and Cutliff (2001), using quantitative terminologies to decipher the language and expressions more commonly associated with qualitative studies, demonstrates integrity, competence and trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness and/or credibility refers to the question of match between the illustration of viewpoints by the researcher and what was actually said by the participant. The research is deemed credible and hence valid if the multiple realities captured and documented are as closely aligned as possible to the veracities divulged by the participants (Liamputtong, 2013). In order to help establish the credibility of this study, clearly linking the research findings with participant's realities to demonstrate 'truth', the researcher continually cross-checked the data. Different forms of questioning were used throughout the process to determine if responses were dependable. Data findings were collaborated in previous and subsequent interviews, with themes continually verified, compared and contrasted. Written transcripts were repeatedly read and were returned to the participants to verify what was documented as said, was an accurate reflection of what was said. Similarly,

findings were also returned to participants to gauge their responses to the interpretation and analysis of the data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Liamputtong, 2013; Rolfe, 2006).

### **3.6.2 Validity**

Validity in qualitative research is concerned with the suitability and compatibility of the instruments, processes and data employed. In essence, the reader needs assurances that the researcher, has laid down solid foundations and has comprehended them correctly. For example, the design is sound for the methodology chosen and the adoption of a particular methodology is suitable for answering the research questions and so on. Hence, the findings can be taken by the reader as being a true and accurate account (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Liamputtong, 2013).

There are several strategies a researcher can adopt to augment the validity of a study beyond the theoretical framework and paradigm assumptions underpinning the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition to detailed field notes and a comprehensive audit trail being kept, thick descriptions of the data were included to increase rigour. For example, actual quotes were included verbatim to illustrate 'good fit' between the data and analytical results (Liamputtong, 2013). This notion will be explored further in the data analysis section. All participants were invited to review their transcripts and asked during the interview if they would like to see a draft before the study was published. This participant validation or member checking is used to heighten credibility in checking for accuracy and reverberation of their experiences (Carlson, 2010; Rolfe, 2006). According to Anosike et al., (2012) it can also be used to seek further clarification on explicit presuppositions.

Purposeful sampling is another powerful means to increase the validity of the current study. The phenomenological framework does not require a large sample. However, those participants included in the sample must have encountered the phenomena and have the experience to tell, ensuring rich descriptions of the data (Liamputtong, 2013). During the course of the interviews, participants frequently offered up names of other senior executives that may not have been reached through the initial purposive sampling. This represents an example of population validity, where the sample taken is representative of



the population (Creswell, 2013; Liamputtong, 2013).

Creswell (2013) recommends at least two of the above-mentioned strategies be employed in qualitative research to legitimise the research process and demonstrate rigour. In addition to establishing the competence and integrity of the researcher. Please refer below to Table 3.1 to see the protocols that were followed in this study.

**Table 3.1– An example of protocols followed to ensure validity and reliability**

<b>Methodological strategies employed to ensure the 'trustworthiness' of the findings.</b>
1. The ongoing recognition and reflection of biases in sampling and methods employed to make certain there is adequate depth and relevance of data collection and analysis.
2. Scrupulous record keeping, that establishes and validates a clear decision making trail, while confirming interpretations of data are consistent, dependable and translucent.
3. Accounting for, documenting and substantiating individual biases, which may be seen to have influenced findings.
4. Ascertaining and providing for comparison cases that seek out similarities and differences across participant narratives to ensure different perspectives are represented.
5. Incorporating copious verbatim descriptions, both rich and thick, of participants' narratives to substantiate conclusions drawn.
6. Demonstrating lucidity by detailing thought processes throughout data analysis and preceding interpretations.

*(Adapted from Noble & Smith, 2015)*

### **3.6.3 Triangulation**

In undertaking a research project, the aim is to unite theory, research and practice in order to arrive at a comprehensive justification of results (Salkind, 2010). Triangulation is frequently used in qualitative studies to test validity and strengthen credibility. It refers to the practice of exploiting multiple sources of data or comprising numerous approaches to analysing data, to arrive at a convergence of information to develop a wide-ranging understanding of the phenomena, minimising the room for error (Liamputtong, 2013; Salkind, 2010). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) outlined four kinds of triangulation: (1) data triangulation: the application of numerous data sources in a solitary study; (2) investigator

triangulation: the custom of multiple researchers to investigate a specific phenomenon; (3) theory triangulation: the practise of two different theoretical frameworks and (4) methodological triangulation: the use of several approaches in data collection. In increasing the confidence of this study data triangulation was employed.

Multiple quotations from the data were used, from multiple participants to illustrate and provide confirmation of emerging themes and additional detail and context for interpreting the results (Carlson, 2010; Liamputtong, 2013). In an attempt to gain consistency and to verifying findings, interviews with participants where possible, were compared with annual reports, published interviews with CEO's, strategic plans and organisational surveys. According to Salkind (2010), this strategy brings better focus to the construct of interest. He avers that if data from more one source collaborate in support of the same conclusions, the researcher can be more certain in its validity. It should be acknowledged that an inherent limitation in triangulation is the time and the financial resources required. The researcher therefore immerses themselves in the judicious balancing act of the art of triangulation and producing definite conclusions (Salkind, 2010). Thus, data triangulation was deemed to be the most useful and sound in reaching the designed research outcomes within predetermined resources.

#### **3.6.4 Generalisability**

Generalisability is prudently and commonly applied to quantitative studies, however it is not an expected element in qualitative research. Largely as qualitative domains are concerned with providing in-depth explanations by examining a specific phenomenon in a particular population, and or context. Not with conveying universal laws or statistical probability that may be applied with certainty to other populations (Leung, 2015). While it is impossible for a qualitative researcher to prove a study's findings can be applied earnestly to other populations and contexts. Results are still significant in that they may illustrate a degree of comparability in terms of ideas and experiences that may be transferred from one setting to another (Liamputtong, 2013). Thus, it is vital that qualitative researchers include strategies that augment the credibility of a study throughout research design and implementation. While there is no universally acknowledged terminology and criteria

exercised to evaluate qualitative research, approaches employed in this study may assist in the credibility of study findings.

### 3.7 Data Collection

Data collection is the systematic fashion of gathering information. Within the practice of qualitative research, there are three core approaches to the collection of data: participant observation; interviewing; and the use of personal documents (Anosike et al., 2012). The present study involved collecting data through semi-structured interviews. As is characteristic of many qualitative studies, this method allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of executives in the boardroom. Further exploring how and why certain decisions are made and offering an insiders perspective into what interventions may be required to alter the way marketing is viewed in the future. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and give the most direct approach in ensuring data acquired is both rich and nuanced in the key areas. Whilst still affording participants the flexibility to bring their own personality and outlooks to the discussion on a particular phenomenon. An extract of a semi-structured interview discussion guide for this study exploring executive’s insights of marketing can be seen in Table 3.2 below and in the Appendices (Appendix D). After conducting an extensive literature review, an interview schedule was developed, prior to commencing data collection.

**Table 3.2 - Extract of interview discussion guide**

1. What does your executive team look like?
2. What are the critical issues facing your executive management team and executive management teams in general?
3. Is there an ideal skill mix to have in the boardroom?
4. How would you describe the approach your executive has adopted when it comes to decision making?
5. How does your executive accommodate and/or balance the needs of stakeholders in your decisions making?
6. Does any executive have more influence than another when it comes to exercising strategic choice and why/why not?

7. How would you describe marketing and the role it plays within your organisation?
8. Does the marketing discipline speak the same language as others in the boardroom? Is there any notable differences and why do you think?
9. What value do you see marketing brings to the executive suite and why?

Semi-structured interviews are fundamentally a direct conversation between two people, within a specific structure and purpose. Thus allowing the participants to tell their story, while the researcher acquired a rich understanding of the decision making processes and prescribed organisational relations (Liamputtong, 2013). A cross sectional approach is consequently adopted, as data is collected at a single point in time (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). Immediately after an interview, impressions were recorded and detailed notes taken. The “24 hour” rule was studiously followed, requiring comprehensive notes to be completed within a day of the interview (Ellis & Pecotich, 2001; Yin, 1984).

### **3.8 Data Site, Access and Sampling**

The primary purpose of collecting textual data is to assay how and why marketing operates in the way it does. Prior to data collection, several methodological choices need to be made to decide the scope of the phenomena and in settling the trajectory. Strategies determining the identification of research participants, accessibility and the research site ensures feasibility of the study, relevance and richness of the information in answering the research questions.

#### **3.8.1 Site**

As direct conversation between researcher and participant is a central element in this phenomenological study, it was imperative that interviews took place where participants felt most at ease. Given participants were in executive leadership roles conducting interviews at their place of work, increased convenience for scheduling the appointment. Being in a familiar environment was not only helpful for the participant in reflecting on their experiences, it provided the additional opportunity for the researcher to observe other interactions as they occurred in their natural setting. Participants took the liberty of booking

meeting rooms at their place of work, on a day and time most convenient for them. One interview was conducted on the WebEx online platform due to COVID-19 restrictions. Another was booked at a co-working office space, where a business meeting room was hired. This was located centrally for the participant who attended the interview on a day off.

### **3.8.2 Access**

Obtaining access to executive level participants sometimes offered up a challenge, in that they could be difficult to reach. This was due largely to the process of transacting with gatekeepers and the associated complexities of facilitating and maintaining access into large organisations. A personalised letter to each participant, detailing request for access and an information sheet detailing the intention of the research and participant involvement was emailed to each person. If there was no response after one week, the researcher called to ask their assistance in the study. Only three potential participants could not be reached after several attempts, this non-response was deemed relatively low by the researcher. All others demonstrated extraordinarily levels of accessibility and willingness to participate, in which the researcher is extremely grateful.

### **3.8.3 Sampling**

Qualitative studies rely greatly on purposive sampling, in a deliberate attempt to choose individuals that provide quality, crucial and rich data about the subject under examination. Rather than frequency or empirical generalisations, purposive sampling is concerned with the in-depth insights provided by participants that may not be garnered by other means (Liamputtong, 2013). In this study, the selection of participants was by virtue of their ability to impart richly, textured information, on marketing's impact in the executive suite. Criteria for selection was based on the likelihood that these key informants could contribute information that would help answer the research questions. Previous research suggests that organisational power and influence vary in circumstance (Singh, 2009) so it was important to include variation in the type and size of organisations studied and their subsequent hierarchal structures.

At the commencement of this study, external environments of the selected participant organisations were examined to include both turbulent conditions, characterised by government regulation, changing consumer sediments, competition, funding availability and the rising frequency of crises and extreme events. As well as more stable partition environmental conditions. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that occurred during this study, all organisations represented in the study are considered to be operating in a complex and uncertain environment that could be sustained for a lengthy time.

The executive management teams of nine different organisations were studied. Four of the organisations were in the not-for profit sector, one was privately owned, three were publicly listed companies and one, a government operated organisation. Four operated within the health environment, one within the technology sector, and one within the banking sector, one within the mining industry, one in community sector and one in the environmental consultancy industry. The smallest C-suite team comprised of six members and the largest had 16. Five of the nine C-suite compositions were inclusive of marketing. To address the need for anonymity and to protect the identity of both the participant and the organisations, they are identified as Company A, B, C, and so on respectively. In addition, demographic details were separated from interview data. Executive leadership experience was the postulated criteria for the recruitment and selection of participants, with direct reporting relationships to the CEO. Accordingly, participants were adequately equipped to articulate how marketing is judged in terms of its perceived value and how it is believed to contribute to overarching strategy, revenue generation and organisational success.

The second criterion was representation from a diverse range of disciplinary backgrounds to ensure that the study was not subtly or unnecessarily skewed towards the marketing discipline. Where possible two people from each organisation were interviewed to preserve the integrity of findings. Of the 12 interviews, two participants sat directly below the C-suite layer. Their inclusion was considered potent to determine if and why inconsistencies may exist in the perceived value of marketing between caste systems.

A total sample of 12 senior executives were included in this study. This was considered an appropriate and adequate sample. In a qualitative study, the researcher will come to a point

in data collection where the data becomes repetitive. At this time, the researcher needs to make a judgement as the practical realities of conducting research. Namely, if further data collection will be likely to produce any additional and/or novel contributions. More specifically, the sample was large enough to explore a diversity and divergence of opinions, delivering cases that were rich, informative and sufficient in describing the phenomenon of interest, to the point that themes started to become repetitive (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2013). Commonly referred to as the point of data saturation, which provides another justification for a particular sample size (Creswell, 2013).

While considerable debate has ensued, regarding the sample sizes in qualitative studies there is no standard sample size that can be applied. It is important to point out that a sample can be too large and too much diversity may actually lessen the likelihood of meaning being extracted across cases. Creswell (2013) cautions that with too many participants, the sheer volume of cases can inhibit meaningful, timely analysis. Consequently, jeopardising the legitimacy of a study. Samples in qualitative research are more disposed to be smaller, providing for the depth of case-oriented analysis that is central to this line of inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As suggested by Creswell (2002), the most suitable sample size will be discovered when the research questions are adequately answered and no new data, themes and coding is generated.

### **3.9 Interviews**

Among qualitative studies, there is a variety of methods of data collection. One of which is interviewing, which is commonly employed by researchers to gather data extensively and intensively (Liamouttong, 2013). Interviews, as described Liamputtong (2013), “are a specific form of conversation where knowledge is produced through the interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee” (p.52). There are three fundamental ways of conducting interviews; they can be unstructured, semi-structured or structured contingent on the nature of the questions asked (Creswell, 2013; Gill et al., 2008; Kavale, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were employed in this study to capture and examine a 'deeper' understanding of marketing. Reflected in the executive’s knowledge and practice of marketing in today’s organisations. Generating empirical data of the

participants given experiences, which cannot be obtained from quantitative methods such as questionnaires, and may vanish if participants were inhibited in their responses because of a structured interview (Creswell, 2013; Gill et al., 2008). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were deemed most appropriate in garnering a deeper scope of inquiry, allowing detailed insights into participant reactions, feelings and attitudes on the issues associated with marketing presence in the C-suite, within the phenomenological paradigm. While providing plenty of opportunities for participants to offer their views in the discussion, leading to opulent textual data (Gill et al., 2008).

Semi-structured interviews essentially consist of a suite of central questions that help to delineate the areas to be explored. Without intruding on and comprising the flexibility to deviate for both the researcher in discovering new information that may not have initially be thought of as pertinent and the participant in elaborating on things that are important in describing their subjective experience (Gill et al., 2008; Liamputtong, 2013). Prior to conducting interviews in this study an interview schedule was developed (Please refer Table 3.2 for an extract and Appendix D for discussion guide). This schedule detailed a series of open-ended questions that not only addressed the aim of the study in answering the research questions. It acted as a memory mechanism, assisting in generating as much information about the study phenomena as possible. Prompts were included in the schedule to probe further into responses, keep the interview sequence consistent ensuring similar questions were asked of all participants, and to broaden the area of inquiry where necessary without jeopardising the importance of responses. Different types of questions were included, ensuring all were considerate of neutrality, sensitivity and understand- ability (Gill et al., 2008).

During conversations between the researcher and participants, the researcher was mindful of allowing prior knowledge and bias to comprise the line of inquiry. For example the researcher avoided asking leading questions or ones that could be considered dichotomous, such as “Wouldn’t you agree that the decisions you make as an executive are more aligned with marketing elements, because you have marketing represented in your C-Suite”? Instead, questions were posed to encourage the participants to talk and offer their own version of the social reality under consideration.



For example, “What do you think of your executive team decision making processes and alignment with elements of marketing? In addition, the researcher precluded the chance for either the process or the content of the interview to be manipulated by being cautious of agreeing and/ or disagreeing with statements made by participants (Creswell, 2002, Liamputtong, 2013). While the flow of questions was predominantly shaped by the researcher, the participants responded in a manner that was most natural and unique to them.

Active listening was an important component in data collection. Largely as what is not said can be just as important to what is. The researcher paid considerable attention to participant nuances and subsequent prompts evolved and were refined throughout the interview process. Thus, ensuring participants were able to narrate their experiences as abundantly as possible, without unwarranted disconnections. It is important to note that the researcher was not seeking a factual datum. Rather, the researcher aimed to document the views and reactions of the participants and the meanings they were conveying concerning marketing in the executive boardroom (Creswell, 2002; Liamputtong, 2013). Data was audio recorded, ensuring the enunciation of meaning was encapsulated, and allowed the researcher to read and re-read transcripts at a later date. Common themes from the unique experiences of each participant were identified. It is through the methodical examination that results were analysed and deciphered within an interpretive research paradigm.

### **3.9.1 Ethical Considerations**

The primary ethical consideration in this study was making certain that participants were aware that their involvement was entirely voluntary and that results would remain anonymous. The study maintained the highest ethical standards for human research, ensuring informed consent, the right to privacy, and protection from harm (Liamputtong, 2013). Creswell (2002) states that it is the responsibility of the researcher to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the participants. Throughout the research process, the researcher respected each individual’s views and opinions. The researcher was mindful that ethical dilemmas can present at any time during a study and planned preventive action

should an obstacle arise. For example handling and managing distress during an interview due to any unexpected disclosure.

Ethics approval was granted from the Human Research Ethics Committee at Curtin University and all stipulations were strictly followed. The risk of participating in the study was minimal and any exposure to potential psychological duress was deemed limited. At the commencement of each interview the researcher provided another synopsis of the study, (similar to what was sent to each participant in confirming the interview), and reiterating that participation was entirely voluntary and consent could be withdrawn at any time during the interview. The researcher then read the consent form to participants, asked participants if they had any questions or concerns before witnessing each participant signing their agreement and consent to participate.

Assiduousness was taken to ensure that data collected were not published in a way that could jeopardise or do harm to participants. During analysis the use of quotes were de-identified and referred to as participant one, two and so forth. Anonymity and confidentiality was safeguarded by not circulating any material that could be used to recognise or identify an informant or an organisation. On completion of the interviews, participants were provided with a copy of their transcript and findings were provided on request. At conclusion of each interview, participants were again provided with the researchers contact details if they needed to get in touch for any reason. All of the data gathered for this study (both electronic and hardcopy) has been and will continue to be itemised and stored securely to satisfy the confidentiality commitments made to participants, associated companies and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research for a period of 7 years. After which, it will be disposed of by Curtin University.

### **3.10 Data Analysis**

Data analysis can be defined as the ongoing, dynamic process of applying systematic procedures in order to make sense and develop an understanding of the raw textual data that has been acquired (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Liamputtong, 2013). In a qualitative study, there are large volumes of textual data that needs to be

refined, so that the experiences of those that lived them can be illuminated and the richness of a particular phenomenon shared. Unlike quantitative analysis where the data is analysed through statistical means (Liamputtong, 2013). There are no one-size-fits-all solutions in analysing data in a phenomenology study. It is up to the researcher to use their subjective judgement to describe and analyse the non-quantifiable information that is present and to bring the raw data to life.

As Liamputtong (2013) suggests, “there are many ways to move from the field to the text”, (p.511). In other words, there are various guidelines, approaches and strategies a researcher can adopt in making sense of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Liamputtong, 2013). For example, thematic, narrative and discourse analysis can be applied to gain a profound sense of the particular phenomenon under study. Each approach offers up a different way in which to view and construe a study’s findings (Liamputtong, 2013). Thematic analysis was used in this study to identify and highlight underlying currents, themes and patterns that materialised from the data to provide a full horizon of understanding. Going beyond purely counting central phrases or words in a body of text, thematic analysis explores perspicuous and implied meanings within the data by extracting themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as, “A method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data”, (p.79). Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) contend that there are in fact three principal aspects to qualitative data analysis, which include describing, classifying and connecting. In this study, data analysis was started early, after the transcription of the first interview and thereafter each round of data collection, interweaving data collection and analysis (Liamputtong, 2013). Unlike quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis is a dynamic process.

### **3.11 Preparing the Data**

All auto-taped interviews were transcribed to text by the researcher, allowing the researcher to stay as close as possible to the text, remaining open to what the data were saying, identifying important words or expressions, as well as generating ideas as to what themes were emerging from the collected data. Once the transcription of each interview was complete, it was read and re-read. While reading each transcript notes were written in

the margin and key words were highlighted. Thus, allowing the researcher to think about what had been gathered, and how the stories told by participants may shed light on the broader study. As suggested by several academics (e.g. Auerbach & Silverstone, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell, 2013), researchers should never miss the opportunity to highlight, colour, bold and pull out important quotes. This process is invaluable in identifying 'codable moments' that are worthy of further attention. Going back and forth between transcripts and data collection afforded the researcher the opportunity of reflection and to create new strategies for subsequent collection to profit from improved data in subsequent interviews, clarify and build on preceding responses (Anosike et al., 2012; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Liamputtong, 2013).

At the completion of data collection, all transcripts were read several times to gain an appreciation of the whole before commencing analysis. Analysis of the data was grounded in an inductive approach and done within the attitude of phenomenological reduction. In this study, the six-step thematic analysis approach was adopted, initially developed by Braun and Clarke (2008). Which provided the framework that facilitated in the analysis of the data (Giorgi, 2009). Steps can be seen detailed in Table 3.3. The software package NVivo was used to assist in transforming the raw data. Largely due to its simplicity to use and the ability to import transcripts in a word document directly into the program, keeping everything in one place, allowing the coding of documents easily on the screen. In addition to the ability of retrieving data quickly, such as extracts from interviews and memos written about particular aspects and linked to relevant pieces of text. It is important to note that this software did not analyse the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Each interview was assigned a numerical code to replace and protect participants identify and filed under corresponding files names, 12 folders were created.

**Table 3.3 Example of Thematic Analysis Approach**

Familiarisation	Coding	Theme Generation	Review of Themes	Defining and naming themes	Write up
<p>Initial read through of all textual data.</p> <p>Initial notes written down.</p> <p>Individual transcripts read line by line.</p> <p>Each sentence provided with a description.</p>	<p>Identification of specific segments of information.</p> <p>Important words or groups of words highlighted and labelled accordingly.</p> <p>Repetitive patterns emerging identified and highlighted.</p> <p>Closely examine the data to classify common themes – topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that are repeated throughout the transcripts.</p>	<p>Segments of information labelled to create categories.</p> <p>Repetitive themes searched for.</p> <p>Inclusive of verbatim quotes from research participants.</p> <p>Organise into categories.</p> <p>Numerous early subject matters generated and progressively classified and refined across sources.</p>	<p>Reduce overlay &amp; redundancy among categories check themes work with codes.</p> <p>Ensure themes are useful and precise.</p> <p>Grouping and generating a structure from the themes, by continually repeating the process and coding the descriptive themes to a higher level.</p>	<p>Create a model incorporating the most important categories.</p> <p>Define and name themes.</p> <p>Clear definitions are generated.</p> <p>Reduce themes to a structure that offers an explanation of the behaviour.</p>	<p>Write up of analysis of the data.</p> <p>Describing gut sense about the subject matter (Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998).</p> <p>Linkages from the data to theory are based on reflections of theoretical literature.</p>
<p>Countless sheets of text</p>	<p>Numerous fragments of text</p>	<p>30-40 groupings</p>	<p>15- 20 categories</p>	<p>3- 8 categories</p>	<p>3 themes</p>

*(Adapted from Creswell, 2002, p.266)*

### 3.11.1 Initial Coding

Coding is the primary process that allows the researcher to make sense of textual data, by identifying and breaking down items of interest into manageable fragments, providing each fragment with a descriptive label, word or short phrase, so that the researcher can move beyond the raw data to gain an overall impression and subsequently make analytic interpretations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). There are no set rules for coding, as it is principally an interpretive act. Codes are essentially constructs or labels generated by the researcher to apprehend a datum's fundamental essence. These constructs are then used by the researcher to search across data sets to determine patterns, themes and repeated categorisation, in order to produce meaningful interpretation (Liamputtong, 2013; Vogt, et al., 2014). During this initial coding phase, the researcher kept a copy of the purpose of the study inclusive of research questions and theoretical framework in front of her, to ensure coding decisions were focused at all times (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). In addition, a general list of basic questions were kept on hand during all cycles of coding, so that the researcher could reflect and examine the text frequently and continually with these same questions (Liamputtong, 2013; Saldana, 2009). Please refer to Table 3.4 that lists the prompts used during coding phases.

**Table 3.4 Coding Question Prompts**

1. How is what is being said similar to, or different from, other incidents or events chronicled previously or elsewhere?
2. How do participants talk about, characterise, and understand what is going on?
3. What conventions do they hold true and what assumptions are they making?
4. What do I understand to be going on in the narrative?
5. What did I discover or comprehend?
6. Does anything surprise or intrigue me?
7. Did anything disturb me?

*(Adapted from Saldana, 2009).*

During this coding process, the researcher, with an open mind, went through each transcript line by line, bracketing out prior knowledge of marketing in the executive suite, including other interviews and personal experiences. Identifying important words, phrases and meanings that signified particular themes in each response. This ensured that findings were based on the data, and subsequent interpretation was on what was actually said about it and not personal belief. Further enhancing the confirmability of the research (Giorgi, 2009; Liamputtong, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Table 3.5 below is an illustration of several codes directed to data from an interview transcript in which a participant describes how marketing can bring value to the organisation. It was done directly after transcription was complete, so that the voice of the participant was still palpable in the mind of the researcher. The codes are founded on what outcomes the participant associated with marketing. Codes taken directly from what a participant says are placed in quotation marks. This is called as an ‘in Vivo Code’ in which labels are given from names that participants actually use in their own narration of experiences (Anosike et al., 2012; Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Liamputtong, 2013).

**Table 3.5 Example of Initial Coding Process**

Raw Data – Interview Extract	Preliminary Code
<p>“I think from a marketing point of view I there is probably a few kind of things that I see fundamental to bringing value to the organisation. And being the voice of the customer, it is also making sure, um were different and relevant. So I think if um, if you don’t put a marketing lens on some things we are just going to be like everyone else saying the same things to the same people and not creating any opportunities to grow. And that’s the other thing right, growth”.</p>	<p>Customer centricity Creativity Differentiation “Growth” Opportunity Relevance</p>
<p>“Marketing is a leap of faith but using skill sets in business development to get others to see beyond cost management</p>	<p>Opportunity</p>

and the opportunity it presents to build new opportunities and revenue streams”.	Revenue Growth Business development
“I think it’s far more powerful when you’re not clones of each other”.	Diversity
“Best described I think as how you portray yourselves to your broader public or your potential customers”.	Marketing
“Instead of being a hodge podge of different things, this is how we are going to talk to people so in fact they don’t even need to read the words to know that this is the same kind of document”.	Consistency of brand Promotional collateral
“I think he’s an income guy, not an expense guy. He’s trying to win the war by generating more activity, rather than screwing down costs”	CEO decision making Strategy Measures of success
“I often think the people who drive marketing campaigns know nothing about marketing”.  “Marketing people are so stretched at any given time because there’s not enough of them and they got all this, that you end up being a tact on afterthought, that’s not actually done well, there’s no budget and were trying to screw down costs and that’s not providing that premium experience”.	Marketing Skills & experience Appropriately resourced Metrics Impact Customer experience



<p>“Marketing plays a key role in terms of you know being able to forecast and you know information we’re directly getting. I mean fundamentally they are part of our strategy and our short-term disruption elements, and also the landscape for what we do strategically”.</p>	<p>Marketing Strategy Disruption</p>
<p>“I think from a structural, I mean marketing perspective it sits you know within the commercial um part of our business, but they’re you know a key component in directing the strategy for the organisation, you know I think yeah with there’s obviously a very strong understanding that they support our ability to generate revenue”</p>	<p>Commercial Strategy Marketing Revenue generation Support Value</p>
<p>“So it’s about being able to convey the right information to the right target audience and being able to customise that depending on who you’re trying to communicate to”.</p> <p>“The communications bit is definitely a specific skill set.”</p>	<p>Marketing Communication Skill set</p>

In going through each transcripts thoroughly, extracts like the above were pulled out by the researcher and various phrases that were considered thought provoking, curious, interesting or pertinent to the phenomenon under investigation were highlighted in different colours. These ‘codable moments’, were then matched to pre-existing codes or new ones were generated. Each code represented an impression, notion or feeling that was articulated in that fragment of text. New codes were added as the researcher moved through the transcripts (Boyatzis, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It is common in this early stage of analysis for there to be a multitude of terms and corresponding codes that emerge.

Often referred to as first order categorisation (Gioia et al., 2012). Once all the data had been coded, the researcher started the processes of refinement, seeking and identifying similarities and differences, in order to shift away from the raw data (Gioia et al., 2012; Saldana, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **3.11.2 Second Cycle Coding – Axial Coding**

At the completion of first cycle coding the researcher transitioned to axial coding, which is the second phase of coding. It is during this phase that thematic analysis becomes more obvious. Interesting aspects arising from the data form the beginning of themes. The concern of the analysis is collating together all data into groups, identified by code and grounded within the participant voices, to create a structured stage for the production of meaning (Allen, 2017; Strauss, 1998). This stage afforded the researcher the opportunity to contemplate the codes, gaining a comprehensive overview of the common points and topics that frequently appeared across the data set. While engaging in continual analysis to inductively pinpoint linkages and patterns between open codes to further refine categories and commence theming (Allen, 2017; Strauss, 1998).

Table 3.6 and Table 3.7 demonstrates the progression from first cycle coding to axial coding and then may progression to the central themes. During this process there were 81 codes in the first cycle of coding, after which 20 axial codes were identified. For example 80 (98%) of the codes were identified within the first nine transcripts. It was clear that the point of data saturation had been reached where there was a significant decline in emergent categories. The responses received after the ninth interview yielded only one additional category. As suggested by Guest et al., (2006) the point of saturation in qualitative research is justified by documenting the progression of category identification. At this point in data collection, three more interviews were included as they had already been scheduled, in addition to ensuring adequate number of participants so that no new themes and codes were produced. This decision was also substantiated by Creswell (2002) positing that the most suitable sample size will be discovered when the research questions are adequately answered and no new data, themes and/or coding is produced.

**Table 3.6 Example of Process Mapping Journey of Analysis**

<b>Samples of Raw data – Interview extracts</b>	<b>Preliminary code</b>	<b>Axial code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<p><i>“You get so many organisations that say that they are, but they generally don’t put the customer at the forefront of all their thinking, so sure they will listen to the customer but they still think finance is at the forefront because their looking at the immediacy of the return”.</i></p>	<p>Customer centrality Decision-making Finance Return on investment Short-term</p>	<p>Shareholders vs Stakeholders Business environment Performance measures Marketing obstacles Marketing opportunity</p>	<p><b>Marketing Manifestations, Obstacles and Opportunities</b></p>
<p><i>“Giving everybody that opportunity to have a voice, you are going to have a discussion. For the board to be really diverse, and value that diversity, so that whole board environment. The AICD course is brilliant, they talk about diversity and creating all these environments, I still see very few that truly do that well”.</i></p>	<p>Diversity Discussion Decision-making Boardroom Environment Culture Change Commercial acumen Value</p>	<p>Organisational structure Performance measures Culture Business Environment Boardroom</p>	<p><b>The Executive Boardroom</b></p>

<p><i>“If you’re proactive you can anticipate the change and therefore you’re constantly tinkering with or so if you’re always winning races in a car if you don’t continue to tinker and look at what else is happening in the market but your always still wining, so Manchester United is a great example, so Manchester United as a team used to win things and then because the manager had this thing where he just wanted to keep getting better and better they changed the team over so this team that won everything in two years it had completely changed. But they kept on winning because they kept on thinking, we need to get better, we need to get better, we need to get better. As a team they kind of didn’t have competition I mean they did up until a point there wasn’t really</i></p>	<p>Measures of Success</p> <p>Performance</p> <p>Team</p> <p>Dynamics</p> <p>Change</p> <p>Innovation</p> <p>Motivations</p> <p>Proactive vs reactive</p> <p>Market Drivers</p> <p>Environment</p> <p>Competition</p> <p>Management</p> <p>Strategy</p> <p>Impact</p> <p>Business Development</p> <p>Improvement</p>	<p>Leadership</p> <p>Team dynamics</p> <p>Differentiation</p> <p>Innovation &amp; Growth</p> <p>Competitive advantage</p> <p>Performance &amp; Success</p> <p>Metrics &amp; Accountability</p>	<p><b>Organisational performance</b></p>
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<p><i>someone else there at the same level pushing them every year but internally, they had it, they knew that in order, if they wanted to stay top of the pile they had to keep getting better”.</i></p>			
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**Table 3.7 Example of Moving from Preliminary and Axial Codes to Themes**

<b>Preliminary code</b>	<b>Axial code</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Customer centricity	<i>Marketing role &amp; function</i>	<b>Marketing Manifestations, Obstacles and Opportunities</b>
Customer experience	<i>Marketing skill set, competencies &amp; capabilities</i>	
Impact	<i>Marketing obstacles</i>	
Creativity	<i>Marketing opportunity</i>	
Differentiation	<i>Organisational structure</i>	
“Growth”	<i>Shareholders vs Stakeholders</i>	
Opportunity	<i>Customer centricity</i>	
Challenge	<i>Performance measures</i>	
Relevance	<i>Hierarchy of trust</i>	
Revenue generation	<i>Culture</i>	
Poorly defined roles	<i>CEO</i>	
Commercial acumen	<i>Lifecycle of business</i>	

Strategic outlook	<i>Business Environment</i>	
Strategic alignment		
Value		
Stakeholder management		
Customer champion		
Internal branding		
Data aggregation		
Interpreter		
Disseminator		
Culture		
communicator		
Business development		
Relationship management		
Competition		
Competitiveness		
Collaboration		
Function		
Role		
Confusion		
Definition		
Disruption		

<p>Metrics</p> <p>Accountability</p> <p>Support</p> <p>Consistency of brand</p> <p>Promotional collateral</p> <p>Measures of success</p> <p>Resources</p> <p>Team</p> <p>Dynamics</p> <p>CEO</p> <p>Trust</p>		
<p>Historical /legacy</p> <p>Roles</p> <p>New CEO</p> <p>New direction</p> <p>Flat</p> <p>Poorly defined roles</p> <p>Fit for purpose</p> <p>CEO leadership style</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>Culture</p>	<p><i>Organisational structure</i></p> <p><i>Organisational culture</i></p> <p><i>SWOT</i></p>	<p><b><i>Organisational Performance</i></b></p>

<p>Team dynamics</p> <p>Sustainability</p> <p>Purpose &amp; mission</p> <p>Values</p> <p>Business environment</p> <p>Growth</p> <p>Opportunity</p> <p>Service vs product industry</p> <p>Competitive landscape</p> <p>Consumer</p> <p>Number of employees</p> <p>Head office base</p> <p>Revenue</p>		
<p>Protect CEO</p> <p>Cost containment</p> <p>Maintaining good relationships</p> <p>Understanding organisational dynamics</p> <p>Trust</p>	<p><i>Role of Executive</i></p> <p><i>Composition</i></p> <p><i>CEO vision and leadership</i></p> <p><i>Performance measures</i></p> <p><i>Strategic mindset and intent</i></p> <p><i>Diversity</i></p>	<p><b><i>Executive Suite</i></b></p>



Strategy	<i>Executive traits, skills and attributes</i>	
Decision making		
Maximise shareholder returns	<i>Change management</i>	
Balance needs of stakeholders and shareholders	<i>Transformational leadership vs management</i>	
Performance	<i>C-suite characteristics</i>	
Holistic thinking	<i>Stakeholder centric vs Shareholder centric</i>	
Disruption	<i>Dynamics &amp; Diversity</i>	
Accountability		
Return on investment		
Deliver		
Conflict resolution		
Advocacy		
Lobbying		
Coaching		
Problem solving		
Recruitment need		
Agility		
Negotiation skills		

Networking		
Operational vs strategic		
Background experience and skills		
Functional discipline		
Diversity		
Team dynamics		
Skills – tenacity & persistence		
Ability to disagree		
Nuanced		
Speak the truth		
Maintaining good relationships		
Trustworthy		
Commercial acumen		
Influential		
Skilled		
Knowledge		
Inspirational		

Transformational		
Ability to manage change		
Willingness to embrace change		
Stakeholder		

### 3.11.3 Theming the Data

In the next phase of analysis, the researcher reflected upon the data and codes engendered during axial coding, delving deeper to identify themes frequently repeated across the data set. In addition to ensuring themes covered the entirety of the data (Novell et al., 2017). Theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research offering a credible way of interpreting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Theming helps to provide identity to the commonality of lived experience, circling through the same network of ideas within a particular group in order to make it meaningful in relation to the proposed research questions (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Guest et al., 2006).

Thematic analysis assists in the reduction of large volumes of data and codes from earlier stages of analysis into broader, more abstract summations (themes), while retaining the understanding and content (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2014). In this study, data was continually reanalysed and several codes were collapsed and combined under the one theme. One that was most suited to capturing the experiences and reality of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Table 1.6 provides an example of how this process took place. During the course of reduction, the researcher was paying particular attention to the detection of patterns of speech and participants use of metaphors and analogies in describing their reasoning behind marketing's absence from the C-suite.

As proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2008), participants will routinely represent their experiences with the assistance of analogies. For example, P009 talks about how decision-making happened in the executive when the previous CEO was at the helm compared to the present time. **P009**: *“You know very much captain of the ship and everyone else just follows orders”*.

The use of this metaphor assumes the listener knows that a captain of a ship makes decisions based on what they think is right and is indicative that the participant views decision making as either participatory or authoritative.

In outlining the overarching themes, the researcher developed a codebook, detailing succinct definitions for each theme and guidelines dictating circumstances in which they applied or did not apply to particular codes. After all data was attributed to a theme, the researcher returned to the data set to compare themes against it. Thus, ensuring themes were suitable and accurately reflected the data. It was at this point that themes were further refined. For example, the researcher decided that the code ‘internal branding’ was no longer relevant, as it did not appear very often across the data. Accordingly, it was omitted as an axial code and overarching theme. The researcher also decided at this point the code ‘C-suite Characteristics, Skills and Attributes’ made more sense coming under the theme ‘The Executive Suite’ instead of being a theme in its own right. Thus, theming decisions will vary, as they need to be populated with analysis of the data, and capture something important and helpful to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In deciding on the finality of themes, the researcher prudently considered words and phrases that were indicative of a relationship between things, how they might connect and what other kinds of relationships might be of relevance. For example, **P003** stated *“When I think I am at my best is in a growth organisation because it values the marketing skill set very highly”* and *“They are a great example of an organisation that has prioritised the importance of the customer and therefore in my mind marketing.”* These examples may be indicative that causal relationships exist and are best discussed under the theme ‘Marketing Manifestations, Challenges and Opportunities’. Themes were also uncovered by looking through text extracts and identifying words that were connected and suggestive of

conditional relationships. For example, **P005** said: *“Well let’s look at the lens and challenge you to go okay what are we here for and is this going to be the best outcome for achieving that, as opposed to what might be a short-term gain for your particular function”*, when describing the dynamics among members of the executive.

Contextually, the identified themes provide insight into the obstacles marketers face in gaining access to the executive; how they can influence organisational performance; and what they need to do in order to increase their presence in the C-suite. It is through the consecutive iterations of data analysis, detecting, elaborating and layering themes that meanings can be mined. After each theme has been analysed profoundly the researcher presents a textual explanation of the phenomenon under study (Chapter four) and a conceptual framework that depicts the reasons for marketing’s under representation in the C-suite, highlighting the value marketing brings to the executive and what can be done to increase marketing’s presence (Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 2009; Ryan et al., 2007). In verifying the validity of the dataset, the researcher insured that all codes were: (a) unvaryingly applied across all interviews; b) fittingly classified under axial codes; and (c) appropriately categorised under thematic codes. Table 3.7 below depicts the key themes to be derived from the data.

**Table 3.8 Key themes**

Manifestations of Marketing, Obstacles and Opportunities	The Executive Suite Boardroom	Organisational Performance
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**3.12 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter commenced with a discussion on the adopted research methodology, the identification of the research strategy and associated approach. Inclusive of presenting justification of the research methods deployed, selection of participants, data collection and analysis in the current study. This chapter also considered how validity and reliability were met within the present study, as well as the role of the researcher.

The aim of this thesis was to explore and derive meaning on the phenomenon under

investigation. Its purpose was not to present findings as definitive truth. Rather investigating and understanding the meaning of marketing as constructed by various executives and its related roles and importance within the organisation. An interpretive ontology and a social epistemology were the guiding philosophies underpinning this study. A qualitative study within the phenomenological interpretivist paradigm was deemed most suitable in examining the ways in which those in the executive understand and respond to the marketing function. Grounded on understanding the world from the subjective experiences of the participants, data was accumulated via semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling provided a unique population, with in-depth knowledge of the social reality. Delivering a rich understanding of the lived experience from the perspective of the executive, affording the development of a holistic picture of organisational marketing provisions in the upper echelons.

Thematic analysis was performed to help make meaning of the data. Appropriate time was expended analysing the data to ensure findings reflected how participants constructed meaning and the researcher understood the conditions behind the particular problem, while allowing themes to emerge that were grounded in the data. The inductive analysis heightened awareness and understanding about the challenges and barriers marketing faced in gaining access to the C-suite. Allowing the researcher to isolate patterns and classify themes, subsequently leading to the development of a conceptual framework. The next chapter describes the findings of the study.

# Chapter 4 Qualitative Analysis and Findings

## 4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented the methodological positioning and methods adopted in this study including the data collection and thematic analysis. This chapter depicts the themes ascertained during thematic analysis in further detail, providing descriptions of each participant and their experiences in relation to each of the identified themes. Marketing's definition has proved problematic in the past because of the many nuanced differences across organisations. Contextually, the findings in the analysis of the data suggest a new interpretation of the role and function of marketing and perceptual gaps between how marketing's value is understood both within organisation and specifically in the boardroom. Arguably marketing's plight for a position in the executive rests heavily on its ability to address and overcome gaps, in perception, delivery and knowledge. Chapter 4 concludes with a conceptual framework, summarising and translating the data on how the marketing discipline can improve their chances of being a boardroom concern, becoming more widely recognised as contributing value and having a positive impact on an organisations overall success.

## 4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

This study included senior and executive managers from nine different organisations, representing six industry sectors in Australian. The broad characteristics of the study population are described in Table 4.1 below. Common demographic variables of age, sex, education level and executive experience, can be used to help to build a profile of marketing in terms of organisational and cultural circumstance. Which may be used to forecast organisational patterns, and better manage resources. Participants were selected on the provision that they had working experience in and/or knowledge of the upper echelons of an organisation, with a deep understanding of organisational strategy conception and implementation.

**Table 4.1 Demographics of Participants**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Tenure in C-suite in current organisation</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Marketing Background (Degree or substantial experience)</b>
P001	40 -49	M	Masters, AICD	5 years	Director Business & Service Development	Yes
P002	50+	F	AICD, Diploma	2 years 7 months	Director Home Services	No
P003	50+	M	AICD, Post graduate Diploma	1 year 3 months	Chief Operating Officer	Yes
P004	40-49	F	Bachelor	5 years 10 months	Chief Marketing Officer	Yes
P005	40-49	M	Bachelor	8 years 6 months	General Manager Memberships	Yes
P006	40-49	M	Bachelor	7 years 11 months	General Manager – Commercial, Marketing & Communication	Yes
P007	60+	M	Bachelor with Honours	8 years 1 month	Director	No
P008	50+	M	Bachelor	8 years	Executive Director	No
P009	50+	M	PHD	6 years 2 months	Medical Director	No
P010	40- 49	M	Bachelor	0 years in executive  5 years 11 months in current role	Account Executive	No
P011	30 – 40	F	Bachelor	0 years in executive  1 year 8 months in current role	Project Manager	No



P012	30-40	F	Bachelor	5 years 6 months	General Manager Integrated Planning Reporting & Operations	No
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The majority of participants were in their 40's which may suggest this is sweet spot to hit executive level positions. According to research conducted by Korn Ferry in 2016, the average age for a C-suite member in the US is 54, while the mean tenure 5.3 years (Korn Ferry, 2016). In this study, the average tenure was 5.04 years, 66% were males and 33% were female.

Those residing in the executive suite achieved at least a Bachelor level of education and had substantial managerial experience in their respective fields to their current positions. The two participants sitting outside the TMT have the potential to project their career into the C-suite, as both possess the necessary skills sets and career trajectory, as defined by participants currently in the executive. It was important to gain a sense of any differences that may be present in the perceptions and perspectives of marketing, from those residing within the golden circle with those just outside, particularly about the reasons for marketing's representation or lack thereof in the upper echelons of an organisation. In addition, the researcher aimed to develop a framework on how organisations might profit from a new understanding of marketing, based on the phenomenology of TMTs lived experiences. Intriguingly, only three of the participants achieved post-graduate qualifications. As P003 stated:

**P003:** *"I think a less of a reason why where not seeing marketers on boards, but it is a positive argument, is the lack of professional qualifications that sit around marketing. So you will get everyone doing a marketing degree as I did, and the Chartered Institute of Marketing course as well in the UK, but to be an accountant you need to be CPA qualified person, um to be a lawyer you know you have all those components you have to go through, but it's not necessary for marketing".*

One might rightly consider a Bachelor of Commerce to prepare you for leadership, covering a broad set of core subjects, concentrated on the vital aspects and skills necessary to handle the daily operations of an organisation, given more than half of participants in this study obtained this level of education. However, there is plausible need for higher education as one participant outside of the top tier of management alluded to;

**P011:** *“I imagine once you get to that executive level that’s kind of expected that you’ve got postgraduate qualifications in like leadership and management which is I know offered by the organisation once you get up to director”.*

Conceivably a middle management trajectory into the executive is a learning experience itself, balancing post graduate qualifications with an individual’s focus shifting from technical expertise to being centred on building additional ‘soft skills’ of leadership. Findings from this study suggest that leadership skills in the C-suite are perceived as more critical than technical capability. For example as P012 states;

**P012:** *“I guess at this level the view is, you know if you weren’t confident, um technically or operationally then you wouldn’t, you wouldn’t be in the role now. The areas of development are more around um how you can um be more effective as a leader, a contributor”.*

Others remarked in a similar vein;

**P010:** *“You have to have industry knowledge, you have to have an understanding of the skills you bring. You know thinking outside your swim lane, have the ability to look around. Personality, industry, your work experience, where you have worked, what you have done”.*

**P007:** *“We need technical skill, if we had lots of choice we’d select on the soft skill”.*

The amount of positions sitting at the table within the C-suite varied from the smallest at six to the largest executive membership at 16. This variability may well be a reflection of the differing sizes of the organisations included in the study and the respective maturity and purpose. For example, the largest organisation included in the study also had the largest

executive team. Arguably, this organisation had a larger workload to distribute and hence, corresponded with an increase in executive positions. Table 4.2 below provides further detail on the organisational profiles.

**Table 4.2 Organisational Profiles**

Sector	Organisational Type	Organisational Size	Executive Size	Marketing representative in the C-Suite
Health	Not for Profit	1500	8	No
Health	Not for Profit	14 570 (9108 FTE)	16	No
Health	Not for Profit	1026	7	Yes
Health	Government	7500	8	No
Environment	Private	70 FTE plus contractors	6	No
Mining	Public	14 000 (9603 FTE)	10	Yes
Banking	Public	4098	9	Yes
Community	Not for Profit	200	9	Yes
IT	Public	980	12	Yes

When asked about the size of the organisation’s executive team one participant replied;

**P006:** *“I think it highlights how dynamic the organisation is. Um and the range of stakeholders that we deal with”.*

There is no mandated requirement in Australia to have a definite number and/or specific titles of executives represented in the upper echelons of an organisation. Study findings suggest that erraticism exists in executive composition, largely resulting from reactive states of mind. For example, when an identified situation evokes the attention of significant stakeholders and/or a concern has the potential to grow contentious. As described by P011:

**P011:** *“There was a review commissioned by the board, because there was quiet a lot of dissatisfaction. A lot of the recommendations that came out of the review was the executive weren’t managing the service appropriately. It was a very small minority group that had those views but because of their influence and power across the organisation that was taken more seriously by the Director General and those recommendations that came out of that really had to be implemented. They immediately put in place an Executive Director to oversee contract management as a way of saying were focusing on this as a key priority, so they’ve built that into their executive structure which I kind of thought was interesting because it’s like very reactive”.*

Changes in CEOs often resulted in both expected and unexpected changes to the TMT. Study participants remarking new positions or personnel being welcomed into the ranks, positions being amalgamated with another and/or no immediate changes with the CEO taking the position of status quo. These different approaches appropriated to how the organisation was performing at the time of the change, whether the new CEO was an internal succession as well as how quickly the CEO understands and accepts insider capabilities, developmental gaps and their own track record of leveraging strategic and operational capabilities. For instance, P003 said:

**P003:** *“It didn’t use to be that way it happened when the CEO came in and changed the executive team”.* And others continued in the same vein;

**P005:** *“She has certainly brought a different dynamic to the way we operate”.*

**P009:** *“I’ve learnt so much about strong leadership. So anyway the roles we have spoken about were the historic roles at director level and then she has introduced*

*um a Director of Strategy. Like with all new CEO'S we have a big program of change ahead of us".*

**P010:** *"CEOs influence is huge, his leadership team 90% of them were walked out, or not walked out relocated".*

**P012:** *"It's not like a new team of leadership they change structure every time but um yeah, I mean we've got a new CEO and we're in a bit of holding pattern at the moment about some of our structures at the senior levels.*

When an executive resigns all participants agreed that either the CEO him/herself or in conjunction with those remaining would discuss the vacant position in relation to current business priorities before going out to market. As one participant stated:

**P009:** *"The challenge in those appointments is not replacing what you've got, its deciding what you need".*

**P008:** *"Usually if someone leaves, there is an acting person put in the position and there are periods when you would go through and review the structure to make sure, have we got too many? Not enough? Arh, and at the moment we, it's a case of where can we make efficiencies".*

Of the 12, five participants came from a marketing background; the others represented a cross-section of other disciplines such as human resources, management, technology and operations. Five of the nine organisation C-suite compositions included a marketing executive. Of the 12 participants, only one had the formal title Chief Marketing Officer. Findings exhibit diversity in position titles used for marketing roles. Other titles included General Manager Commercial, Marketing, and Communication, Director of Business, and Service Development. An indication that not only different types of organisations attribute different headings to the marketing function but also other disciplines and titles are often collapsed into the marketing remit. As one participant said,

**P012:** *"We're pretty old school in that way, no fluffy names".*

Another advocated the abandonment of the title 'marketing' in all positions across the organisation including in the executive. A move credited to the absence of an organisational wide understanding of what the marketing discipline can contribute, and in an effort to build credibility.

**P001:** *"Hence my function has changed from Marketing Director to Business Development and Service Director, which includes marketing and PR but takes into account um the, what sales looks like in our organisation. So like the thing is we have taken marketing out of the job titles as well because none of those people do marketing in that traditional sense".*

This comment draws attention to marketing's evolution and recognition of its adept ability to work within and across other functions. The absorption of titles and the overlapping of roles may substantiate the marketing discipline possesses a unique interchangeable skill set, taking on responsibility for new business and other areas of leadership. However, within other functional areas it would appear that accountabilities and responsibilities are communicated in their position titles. Feasibly, specific job titles fashion the prerequisite for developing organisational strategy with measurable outcomes. Given marketing is collaborative by nature; it may be the reporting structure that is more problematic in gaining recognition at the apex of an organisation. The Chief Marketing Officer in the sample was fast to counteract the idea of removing marketing from position titles:

**P004:** *"I think marketing is really important to retain in the titles, I think digital can definitely go".*

Validating the important role categorising positions according to responsibility plays in achieving organisational status. In addition, to the freshly found fascination with new marketing concepts surrounding digital technologies. The respondent astutely detailed:

**P004:** *"I feel like, you know we are a bit obsessed with the word digital, everything is digital".*

Another participant shared a similar sentiment:

**P003:** *“The foundations are still the same. So my career I started in public relations, and I had a traditional media and communications team, we turned it into a content team, I remember talking to my head of that area to begin with who was older even than me, that had been in PR, about the fact that his skills are core to that. Yes, he might not know half the technical platforms, but if you don’t understand how to write succinctly and create something that is really spiffy, that’s going to appeal to your target market nothing is going to work. So I don’t think those core skills have changed”.*

These statements acknowledge organisations enthusiasm with the digital age, while simultaneously responding that traditional marketing rudiments are still valid. Curtailing the fuss associated with digital marketing as simply a marketing effort that happens online, reinterpreting and exploiting data, leveraging the lens of today’s technologies to drive successful campaigns.

#### **4.3 Manifestations of Marketing, Obstacles and Opportunities**

Over the last three decades, marketing has been going through an identity crisis and after decades of debate disparity remains (Bartels, 1988). To identify the reasons why marketing is underrepresented at the executive boardroom level, it is useful to garner an appreciation of the idiosyncrasies and manifestations of marketing in practice, the apparent barriers preventing marketing’s bid at the top table, and the biggest opportunities for marketing to step up and own a seat at the table, as perceived by the participants.

##### **4.3.1 Manifestations of Marketing**

As one participant states, whose organisation does not have the function of marketing represented on their executive leadership team:

**P007:** *“I think it’s selling the importance of marketing as one of the things that needs to be dealt with at the highest level. But I think the majority of boards that I’ve seen or have been part of are more concerned with power than they are with functionality”.*

Annotations such as this do nothing to dispel the perpetuated problem. Summating marketing as powerless where it needs to count. It was clear from the findings that disparity existed within the study, wherein all the participants had their own reservoir of wisdom in describing the role and function of marketing within their respective organisations. Table 4.3 provides a brief summary of some of the attributed notions of marketing.

**Table 4.3 Conceptions of Marketing**

Question	Participant Response
<p><b>How would you define marketing?</b></p>	<p><b>P001:</b> <i>“Marketing is essentially a method by which you use to sell your product”.</i></p> <p><b>P002:</b> <i>“I think they think of, I see that they think marketing is selling what we have on offer. To me its marketing is just a sell and but I always think of marketing as like almost, yer just the piece you do to sell a thing, but the thing that is actually important is developing the thing that you are trying to sell”.</i></p> <p><b>P003:</b> <i>“It’s beginning to be seen as more than a chief megaphone officer”.</i></p> <p><b>P006:</b> <i>“I think you know it’s about storytelling”.</i></p> <p><b>P007:</b> <i>“Selling me things I don’t need is a sin, because you know, hell we don’t need more consumption we need less consumption, give me what I need”.</i></p> <p><b>P009:</b> <i>“I think its best described as how you portray yourselves to your broader public or your potential customers. Instead of being a hodge podge of different things, this is how we are going to talk to people so in fact they don’t even need to read the words to know that this is the same kind of document”.</i></p> <p><b>P010:</b> <i>“The evangelisation of our brand”.</i></p>



	<p><b>P011:</b> <i>“It’s about being able to convey the right information to the right target audience and being able to customise that depending on who you’re trying to communicate to”.</i></p>
<p><b>What roles does marketing play within your organisation?</b></p>	<p><b>P001:</b> <i>“The marketing function here to get our product into the market has business development, it has service development, it has marketing, it has PR, it has comms, it has consumer engagement, it has all of those things”.</i></p> <p><b>P003:</b> <i>“To be the voice of the customer back to the business. You are starting to see organisations latching onto marketing being all round great customer experience, and it’s always been about great customer experience. Marketing has always been about that, solving problems, understanding humans and how to connect to humans, I would argue that that is the only discipline around that C-suite that does that”.</i></p> <p><b>P004:</b> <i>“Marketing is almost two parts of the business right. There is a part where we go, here’s what we own from a brand and marketing point of view and here’s our best way to go to market, here’s how we are going to plan our media for the year, this is how we are going, kind of this is how our brand is going to look, talk, feel and stand for, personality and all of those things and that is very much owned by brand and marketing team and that’s owned, and we need to understand best channels, relationships, customers, getting the customer at the right time all of those things. But then there is the other half of marketing that absolutely need to understand what is happening in business and if I take A from X and I take B from Y OMG that makes C and the customer will</i></p>

	<i>love that and there's an opportunity in the market for us to talk about that".</i>
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Findings highlight that marketing is commonly thought of as one of four rudimentary activities, selling, communicating, branding and to a lesser extent customer experience. A large majority of respondents believed that the primary role of marketing was synonymous with selling. As P001 and others stated:

**P001:** *"Marketing is essentially a method by which you use to sell your product".*

**P002:** *"I think they think of, I see that they think marketing is selling what we have on offer".*

**P007:** *"If you asked the technical people to do marketing, they would all say they hate it and don't want to do it as they associate it with cold calling and no one likes that".*

These remarks suggest a myopic view still exists of what marketing entails. That marketing is seen as expending time and effort convincing people they want, what they are offering. This limited understanding assuming marketing synonymous with selling is indicative that the differences between selling and marketing are not recognised, nor well regarded at the highest level. As P009 stated:

**P009:** *"I don't know if advertising and marketing is exactly the same, it's probably not. I don't know about the cross over between marketing and communications, because I suspect they are related but not the same.*

Suggesting further works needs to be done to cement marketing's identity within the organisation. While sales is undoubtedly an important activity, it may be viewed as operational, rather than strategic, a function that could not occur without marketing. Conceivably without marketing brands would not be illuminated and an organisation would remain lifeless, making it arduous for sales to occur. One would think it would be

unimaginable for an organisation to introduce a product or service to the marketplace without an understanding of market dynamics, positioning and publicity. By paralysing marketing to one-dimensional promotional aspects makes it difficult for marketing to engage in meaningful dialogue as to the broader role it plays within the organisation. Let alone seize high value activities associated with predicting and building revenue streams and margins.

It comes as no surprise that those participants with a background in marketing were better placed to articulate marketing's contribution outside of the sales and promotion arena. For example:

**P003:** *"We need to understand best channels, relationships, customers, getting the customer at the right time all of those things".*

**P011:** *"It's about being able to convey the right information to the right target audience and being able to customise that depending on who you're trying to communicate to".*

**P007:** *"It's positioning your brand, differentiating it from the competition and communicating your value proposition to make customers aware and want your product or service offering".*

These responses are more aligned to the strategic aspects of the discipline. Recognising marketing's role in shaping an organisations image, acknowledging and harnessing customer insights to develop strategies and communication elements that subsequently lead to an augmentation in customers. Therefore by extension, revenue and profitability.

#### **4.3.2 The Customer Champion**

It is noteworthy, that there was consensus that the needs and wants of the consumer must be identified so that decisions can be made on how an organisation best satiate them. The majority of participants in this study felt a central tenant of marketing is emphasising the voice of the customer. However, most said that everybody within the organisation should

take responsibility for owning the customer, not just marketing. When one participant was asked who has responsibility for the customer? They replied as follows:

***P008:** "I think it is everybody's role. I think, I think we talk about again going back to the national standards and partnering with the consumer. It should be part and parcel of all you're planning".*

When queried how the consumer was integrated into the planning of strategies at all levels of the organisation. The participant replied:

***P008:** "I think it is understanding the value of the consumer that is missing. So I think at the top end we know and we very much advocate for people centred care um but what that means is difficult in translation. Likewise when I give somebody some information on a consumer, how is that being dispersed, so that I know I guess that a consumer view point has been considered and were building a people centric service".*

P007 shared similar sentiments on consumer ownership:

***P007:** "Everybody does".*

When probed further P007 responded:

***P007:** "There are elements of each role particularly in the leadership team that require client interface and those relationships are important in repeat business".*

While study findings conformed with the literature that consumers should be considered a forceful asset within an organisations arsenal. It would appear the area that should take overall responsibility for the customer was splintered. As one participant stated "marketing brings the voice of the customer". However, when explored deeper, there was no mention of who was responsible for closing the gaps that may exist in the delivery of the customer experience. Although no participant recommended that organisations treat the customer as an island, isolating the customer experience to one department. Findings insinuated that as customer service fell to everyone within the organisation, there was little impetus or

authority to improve it. Perhaps most notable was participants citing their organisations to be 'customer centric', while business practices suggested the contrary. For example, one participant compared their organisation with that of an airline, stating how airlines hone their customer service experiences systematically, while their organisation floundered to deliver consistently particular aspects of the customer journey.

**P009:** *"They've got a script, it's actually the same every time. So it doesn't matter what crew you've got, it doesn't matter if you're flying to Perth or Doha, it doesn't matter if it's a man or a woman, it doesn't matter what their ethnicity is, they've got a system and they run that system, every time. Every time and I don't encounter that in healthcare. No one really cares about customer experience and, and they might pay some lip service to it, but no one really does it like right".*

Additional insights from participants substantiate that in order to align the organisation around customer centricity, there needs to be a leader that not only priorities it, but develops and oversees strategy implementation. Creating a fellowship so they can be successful in their authority on the customer and the impact is seen across the entire organisation. It would seem from the findings that presently customer centricity promises fail to materialise, as the ownership of the customer remains ambiguous. As P003 explains:

**P003:** *"I have only recently heard there's an organisation in Perth where the new CEO has made his entire executive team redundant and he is going about re-employing, so they key component when it was being described to me was they have a monopoly market um they have to work with, but he was observing that the voice of the customer was sitting outside of the executive team and he still wanted to bring it to the centre and to dictate everyone's actions throughout the organisation. So being true customer centric um you know is rare".*

Furthermore comments from participants validated the craving marketing has for customer manifestation in the upper echelons of the organisation. From responses there appears to be unexploited opportunities in the top tier for marketing to magnify being the voice of the customer, connecting the strategic aspirations of the organisation with that of the needs of the customer. It is apparent from the findings that when too many functions are involved

in managing the customer relationship, the customer becomes less lucid and the risk greater that someone else feels like another function is responsible. Therefore, in the end, no one takes responsibility, and consequently no strategy endures for managing, growing and supporting the customer relationship.

When probed further and participants were asked to describe their organisations customers, responses indicated this was easier said than done. Which may be a signal that organisations are not doing enough to share their purpose with their employees. It is evident from the findings that there is a lack of understanding of an organisation's customers and how they integrate with the business model and strategic imperatives.

#### **4.3.3 Stakeholder Management**

While the importance of customers and understanding their needs was apparent, participants indicated an organisations success is not only ascertained by the vigilant treatment of customer centricity, but a wider range of other stakeholders. As P008 explained:

**P008:** *"We have a whole lot of stakeholders out there so we have to have a whole lot of ways to drive business that if you don't take that into consideration then you know, what happens"?*

It was clear participants felt that the pursuit of profits and maximisation of shareholder value could not be done at the expense of building a strong connection with other stakeholders. Another participant's response to balancing the needs of stakeholders noted:

**P001:** *"Okay I get that they have a bottom line component but every little decision takes into account the quad ripple bottom line if you like of patients experience, the economics of it, the finance of the situation, brand effect and whatever else you might throw in there. So that is how all good organisations should work any way to be fair. Every organisation it doesn't matter if their health or not, they should operate with all those components in mind. Because again if you are too finance orientated then you effect patient experience you effect brand moral and your long-term benefit then".*

While another participant added:

**P012:** *“I mean we’ve got as much weight on social, you know social license to operate um heavy on, and they’re heavy on safety. So you know as an example we have a license to operate strategy around how we manage you know our dust emissions. But we have to put water in our ore, we also have another priority around not having too much moisture for our customer because it causes them problems in the processing. So there’ll often be times where there’s you know a priority that you’ve got to get the balance right between the two priorities that gets the sweet spot between you know the customer outcomes but also the fact that it contributes to your ability to physically keep operating and get licenses to do more”.*

Although financial performance has been thought to be a strong indicator of shareholder value, findings suggest that the key to building organisational resilience, value and ultimately success was openly disclosing concern for all stakeholders. Beyond maintaining dividends to shareholders. As one participant inferred the corporate environment is charged with trade-offs:

**P012:** *“It’s a combination of the two, I mean the stakeholder piece is probably more about how we get our work done and the shareholder piece is around you know continuing to be paying attention to our results and our trends”.*

However, while participants cited it was common sense for organisations to meet the expectations of all stakeholders and society, in terms of sound corporate conduct, the issue of balancing stakeholders versus shareholder priorities is not as settled as one might think in some organisations. For example, P003 remarked:

**P003:** *“At the point of float the culture changed immediately, because the culture went from one of being a growth organisation to suddenly being about we have got half yearly reports to the stock market and now they are our number one shareholder. So if the stock market doesn’t see us returning a decent profit or dividend then they’re going to vote us down, stocks are going to be sold, stock will go down. So that took over from any focus on the customer and I think that is the*

*challenge”.*

It was obvious from participant responses that organisations are highly effective at implementing strategies for improving short-term performance and strengthening their competitive positions. Meanwhile, meeting the expectations of a myriad of other stakeholders without seemingly eroding profits still requires work. Findings indicated that the challenge often lies in convincing executives to consider the long-term play instead of prioritising short-term metrics. For example, P001 remarked:

**P001:** *“It also depends on your shareholders I suppose but if your shareholders are long-term, like Company X’s shareholders are long-term, so they have been around a long-time, so they would expect that your long-term view, that you’re making decisions that aren’t short-term. So perhaps in instances like that if your shareholders are very gain based quarter by quarter then yer, I will think it will affect the way your organisation operates”.*

#### **4.3.4 Challenges for Marketing in Gaining a Seat in the Executive Boardroom**

According to the participants, the challenge for marketing in gaining a seat at the table in the C-suite is communicating the case for marketing as a strategic function highlighting its value beyond organisational cheerleader. As P003 quotes:

**P003:** *“Being able to demonstrate the value add you can provide in that environment around business relationships and stakeholder management. Everyone will think they’re great at it so it’s demonstrating a value add over that, that you can make in that regard”.*

Marketing’s visibility and influence varied across participant organisations. Those organisations that understood the strategic notions employed harmonious execution of the marketing function in the upper echelons. For example:



**P011:** *“I think um I think there’s varying degrees of understanding. I mean my team you know work on a really day-to-day tactical basis with marketing, but certainly at the, you know, senior leadership team absolutely”.*

**P006:** *“The importance of marketing is certainly understood in the organisation. We have had to show um that it has had the impact on return”.*

Interestingly, marketing may be well regarded at the executive table and even have a person representing the function in the C-suite. However, perceived costs were cited as another challenge for marketing. In both securing a position and having a well-resourced team under the top layer to execute strategy. For example as these participants noted:

**P007:** *“We outsource marketing services when needed, I don’t think we need to have it represented all the time. It comes down to cost as well, yes it has managerial relevance but there isn’t the budget to have someone there all the time”.*

**P006:** *“Most organisations have really small marketing teams. I’ve been standing next to some of the large organisations and ask them how big is your marketing team and they go 2-3 people and you go how do you service a whole organisation with that, so once again you kind of get in that trap of being very operational”.*

The themes running through these comments indicate that in order to increase marketing’s influence in strategic outcomes, it cannot be stretched. Marketing need not only be represented at the top table, teams below this layer need to be appropriately resourced. In addition to being clear on what the organisation wants marketing to deliver. Participants believed hesitancy persists in welcoming marketing to the inner sanctum as marketing is still viewed as a cost centre as opposed to an income generator. Implying organisations value contributions to financial performance over other metrics. For example as P006 notes:

**P006:** *“The challenge is understanding the ecosystem of marketing. I think there needs to be broader education in the industry about the role that marketing plays and the outcomes um it achieves”.*

This participant expresses concerns over judging the effectiveness of marketing on one metric. Calling for understanding into other broader influences of marketing success. As P012 said:

**P012:** *“I see marketing as a function that will always work in a partnership of success, it won’t be a single source of success”.*

Participants felt strongly that by having marketing visibility at the top of the organisation provided the opportunity to educate their C-level peers on attributable performance measures beyond the traditional financial metrics. In addition to the role all C-suite leaders play, in prioritising strategies that bring value to organisational success.

Marketing’s role in the executive came under siege when measurement and metrics were concerned. As P007 stated:

**P007:** *“I’ve always found marketing quite hard to measure”. Because you know, you can’t demonstrate it and therefore it can be disputed”.*

Interestingly, those participants whose organisations had a C-suite level proxy in charge of marketing found it difficult to articulate marketing’s role in contributing to organisational value and converting it to a measurable metric. Believing marketing to be more of a peripheral function of doing business. Conversely, those participants that had marketing represented at the top were more aware of marketing’s importance. They felt it was a situation that needed to be resourced to bridge the gap otherwise it was fraught with danger. When probed further, participants cited when a disconnect presents between the top tiers and middle management there is an increased chance of initiatives being poorly linked to strategy. Therefore, marketing is more likely to be responsible for the implementation of strategy rather than in its development. Resulting in the perception that marketing is floundering and does not produce favourable results. Summing up the challenge, one participant states:

**P009:** *“A lot of the work that we do was very reactive based on like the previous year or we need to fix this problem, like can you just do something about it but I was like*

*what's the actual strategy and vision for our team. But nobody could really articulate it".*

Other participants articulate encounters where marketing is faced with educating other C-suite leaders, about what to measure and/or how to interpret the results:

**P011:** *"It's more time working with the business to show value and demonstrate you know opportunity and the threats as opposed to demonstrating their work or just marketing for the sake of you know marketing the worth".*

**P006:** *"There is a long way to go in terms of marketing, the education around what marketing does and the outcomes that marketing has on um an organisation both in the short-term and in the long-term".*

Despite participants acknowledging that marketing can be pressured to take short-term actions to drive quick revenue streams, sometimes at the peril of an organisations best interest. Uncertainty remains in marketing's role in generating revenue, largely as it takes place over the longer-term, which presents an opportunity for marketing to refine its purpose and how its contributions should be measured.

#### **4.3.5 Opportunities for Marketing in the Executive Boardroom**

Results did not paint a bleak picture of marketing's future, with more than half of the participants interviewed conceding that marketing was one of the only functions that appreciated how to generate revenue without sacrificing brand integrity. Participants referenced an organisations relationship with its customers and how it was perceived in the market place as just as important as the ability to prudently apply funds or manage cost. As P003 suggests:

**P003:** *"There's only one discipline that's there to really truly service that income generation, it is the marketers who are trying to connect a business or an object with people that are, who are going to buy your product or use your service".*

This comment suggests that organisations need to view marketing as a future orientated value driver as without it organisations would be practically lifeless. Themes advocate the

need to espouse a shift in thinking to augment stakeholder value. As it is the stakeholders that are the essential component to long-term value. Attaining the right balance between strategy and revenue may be the key to marketing cementing itself inside the C-suite. Participants agreed that demonstrating how marketing can directly affect revenue generation presented the biggest opportunity for C-suite admission. As P012 summarised:

**P012:** *“I think they’ve got to be part of the strategy. I mean they’ve got to be part of that you know their strategic discussions to be able to contribute and add you know the value. We’re working hard with our team on that around how we provide you know greater insight and greater understanding of how operational decisions you know affect our customers”.*

Themes suggest that when organisations are hardwired to concentrate on cost containment they become impassable to new opportunities and income streams. Therefore, there is a negative performance consequence attached to marketing misalignment in organisations. An opportunity exists for marketing to change executive conversations utilising sources of customer insights, transforming them into a holistic pictures of opportunity. Opportunities that can be translated to both short-term and long-term initiatives that drive growth and add value to the organisation. As the below participants suggest, marketing’s ability to add value is contingent on the potency of relationships it can forge:

**P001:** *“By force of personality potentially, you can get yourself there because you make yourself so indispensable at an advisory level to these people that they just go you know what, it’s just better if you’re here”.*

**P007:** *“I think in pursuing growth, relationships become the cornerstones of business to ensure continued success”.*

Leitmotifs suggest that if marketing can foster support for its ability to harness boundary-spanning capabilities among stakeholders, it will be more likely to be seen as a principal partner and advisor at the apex of an organisation. Consequently, marketing needs to confirm the interplay with other disciplines on how it is enabling functional areas to achieve their goals. For example:

**P001:** *“So at the end of the day, I mean everything has to add up. So it’s a holistic model right so if only finance works in your outcome then your actually missing the whole outcome, so what is the outcome? It has to be holistic. It has to be customer orientated. It has to be business orientated, so it’s got to be both, you don’t get one without the other. So it’s got, so if you come with a mentality of win win”.*

**P006:** *“You need your CEO and CFO to be going well yeah, we can understand that sometimes you have to spend money to make money. We have a very sound understanding of each of the different functions and how they contribute to the end outcome”.*

Findings advocate the gap between marketing’s rhetoric and its reality may come down to trust. If marketing is accepted as a trusted partner and advisor within the organisation across both discipline and rank, it will be more likely to climb up the hierarchy. The following participants provide plausible responses to this dynamic:

**P003:** *“Goes back to trust, trust in business, trust in an organisation, trust is the most important thing in my mind in business whether you are leading a team, if you can’t build trust with a team you are never going to be able to lead them, they will always be hesitant about your intentions. You have to build trust with consumers to buy products, otherwise they will go elsewhere, so that leadership dynamics of trust”.*

**P007:** *“Fundamentally who do I trust? Marketers or Accountants. You know in a hierarchy of trust, I’ll trust an accountant, now so what we’re seeing is a marketing person surrounded by accountant or a marketing person surrounded by marketing people”.*

A collectivist orientation and fostering trust with organisational peers may be the breakthrough marketing needs. Extending the notion of value, findings suggest that creative leadership is what sets an organisation apart from another. Which may be a new competency sought by organisations and one that marketing can arguably fulfil. For example:

**P003:** *“That creative side that is the key differentiator”.*

**P011:** *“Your marketing strategies is definitely such a key thing in this kind of competitive world we live in now”.*

These comments cement the importance of marketing and the value in protecting this type of creative thinking from a hostile environment. Creating a culture where creativity and innovation can thrive. Participants identified the synergistic gains organisations receive from managing brand equity. Moving away from transactions to relationships. Performance advantages were cited as being derived from the ability to demand price premiums, customer loyalty and increased market share. However, according to participants marketing metrics such as brand value are not reflected in the balance sheet as it is still thought to lack utility. The opportunity exists to bring about a change in the organisational mindset and for market share metrics to become an important proxy for brand value. For example as P010 said:

**P010:** *“We’ve just got a good following which has been built on over the years and we have changed our strategy to be inclusive rather than exclusive”.*

Findings are redolent that societal expectations provides the chance for marketing to take a leadership role. As P004 mentions:

**P004:** *“They have created a new group exe position: Marketing and Corporate Affairs, it’s based on obviously the reputation issues that the brand faced”.*

Themes around branding and social sensibility alluded to a high dollar value being associated with an organisations positive social footprint. Highlighting the magnitude of ways that societal preferences can create value for an organisation. This alchemy provides marketing a potential opening to turn brand equity and social issue actions into results.

All participants gave plausible responses in highlighting opportunities in marketing's boardroom bid. From developing insights and seizing ambitious ideas, to uniting the C-suite, and transforming other leaders into champions of the marketing agenda. The assortment of ideas put forward indicate the value at stake if organisations fail to recognise marketing insights at the strategy table. As P007 states:

**P007:** *"I often think the people who drive marketing campaigns know nothing about marketing".*

This comment suggests that everyone is quick to have an opinion on marketing, but there is very little expertise. Rather than spending time and energy addressing the fundamental questions of strategy and quantifying the impact of marketing spend, typically marketing is forced into defending and discussing tactical campaigns. Eventually, the C-suite will need to ask itself: How can we empower and position marketing to deliver the greatest benefit to our organisation?

#### **4.4 The Executive Suite**

Executive leadership is broadly defined in the literature as the small group of individuals at the top of an organisation that influence strategic directions and decision making (Barroso-Castro et al., 2017; Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Top executives in an organisation are considered collectively. They may also be referred to as members of the C-suite, which is the highest level of management in an organisation. In general terms, the executive suite or the executive boardroom is the room that is designated for meetings by the top executive decision making group in an organisation. This elite group of executives or directors as they may also be known form the 'executive boardroom' (Brown, 2005; Sheth & Sisodia, 2005).

##### **4.4.1 Executive Decision-Making**

Executives interviewed indicated that they were commonly tasked with making tough choices. When considering strategic and operational decisions a range of issues are taken into account. Such as contemplating the attractiveness of new opportunities, evaluating the

alternatives, assessing strengths and weaknesses in relation to the competition and ensuring decisions do not depart from the overall vision. For example:

**P009:** *“I suspect some tension is good. You know it’s a board’s role to question and you know to make sure the strategy is right”.*

**P007:** *“Here I am on the board trying to figure out how to best use the capital that’s available”.*

Responses conceding executive decision-making hinges on the availability of information and commitment of resources. Interestingly capital was mentioned as the main resource and not those charged with the implementation. Demonstrating that different organisation’s consider things differently.

The majority of respondents felt in their top tier they employed a consensus-based style of decision-making and all members of the executive participated in the process.

**P001:** *“It is very even, yep that’s the shift I suppose, because, I think we now have this certainty if you are in the corridor that you have an even say in what happens in the organisation”.*

**P005:** *“No GM has more influence than any other GM”.*

These responses indicate that no one position has more weight than others do when it comes to decision making. It is assumed at the executive level that irrespective of your functional background, you have the astute ability to evaluate debates, reason, collaborate and be critical of alternate pathways. However, there was acknowledgement that decision-making is not always a black and white scenario. For example, P006 stated:

**P006:** *“So we are all pretty much committed to an organisation wide solution as opposed to um functional. Well I think we have all committed to that long-term strategy and those numbers right. So I think as long as it compliments that, that and um the, the investment and project is reasonable um and you know sometimes,*



*sometimes, there's like um, um quiet um innovative and different out of the box type of thinking".*

This participant recognises that the best decisions are not necessarily the most conventional ones. Sometimes executives need to make a judgement on what might otherwise have been an empty space. Another participant said:

**P005:** *"We don't know it's going to work at all, but take a chance and see if it does work, but you know there's been a couple of things where we have done that and it hasn't worked. But I think at the end it's just always linking back to what you are trying to achieve overall".*

Suggesting that there is room for creativity, experimentation and deviation from preceding decision-making practices. Findings confirm that disagreements do occur and these are frequently expressed through the decision-making process. For example, one participant referred to offering up a different perspective or sharing an opinion that was not widely supported as a disruption:

**P002:** *"It's called disruption then isn't it? And it's about innovation that creates disruption to revenue, and disruption to the model that we have been used to".*

**P007:** *"The ability to disagree is also important".*

These comments suggest that executives at the top table need to possess skills in conflict resolution, advocacy and negotiation, to ensure decisions are made swiftly and efficiently. Participants cited that executive members are expected to and are keenly encouraged to communicate their thoughts and apprehensions at the round table. Pointing out that the sharing and achieving of different perspectives enables alternative courses of actions to be considered. Therefore, any anticipated strategy shortcoming can be discussed and rectified and/or a different path chosen. Thus, ensuring the best possible strategy is chosen with the potential for the greatest impact. For example, P005 stated:

**P005:** *"I think everyone respects, if someone says something that well you know they are completely wrong, it wouldn't be, the challenge wouldn't be disrespectful".*

**P002:** *“Will bring a different perspective and I don’t think CEO 2 is as risk adverse and is more prepared to say nup, let’s just look at this, let’s look at a better way of doing things”.*

One participant felt there needed to be a level of vulnerability when it came to decision-making:

**P003:** *“This is what I am intending to do please trust me, do not do a knee jerk reaction now, let’s deliver this plan and the results will come”.*

While P001 mentioned:

**P001:** *“It does take a totally different mindset, um because on a dollar for dollar level you could argue for different ways for making it work. In my view, it worked because you’re differentiating yourself in the market. It might cost you a little bit, but then the net gain is going to be better”.*

While it was evident that among executive leadership teams it was a requirement that all members be active participants, and not spectators when it came to decision-making. Feeble internal practices had the potential to become obstacles. One participant avowed:

**P006:** *“Decision making is not just based on what you think is right, or what the market wants, but really asking the market what they want”.*

Another alluding to the temptation to be narrow minded and ignorant of new ideas:

**P011:** *“Being able to make informed decision because previous executives that I’ve known yeah haven’t been willing to take on board all of the information to be able to make a decisions, they just have a predetermined idea in their head about this is what we should do”.*

While another suggesting that corporate leaders could succumb to pressure-making decisions based on quarterly earnings growth, and the previous year’s performance and not stakeholder value:

**P008:** *“People get incentivised for not doing the right thing”.*

Although there was no mention of imbalances of power among executives, the CEO was noted to influence the style of decision-making practices. As P002 stated:

**P002:** *“I think in the past there has been a lot of silo discretionary decision making”.*

**P009:** *“Our previous CEO ran um a pretty close shop on decision making”.*

Responses reflecting the varying colour in decision-making capabilities and styles in the upper echelons may be a direct result of the diversity at the table.

#### **4.4.2 Dynamics and Diversity**

According to the executives that participated in this study, diversity of opinion at the top table was needed to ensure biases are challenged. Diversity of thought that transcends gender and ethnicity. As participants pointed out:

**P003:** *“You can substitute a 50 year old male accountant on a board for a 30 year old female accountant and you still get an accountant. So I think that’s the real key bit missing from boards in Australia, is the diversity across those disciplines”.*

**P011:** *“If you have all similar people you get into that groupthink mentality and you’re not really willing to consider other ideas or being able to challenge certain opinions about things”.*

The themes insinuated across responses in relation to diversity of thought, is that little is gained from token representation. An executive board that seems to be diverse might not be where it matters. Indicating the need for organisations to let go of tribal instincts, so they gain a better understanding of a broader collection of stakeholders. It is only through depth and breadth of insight, perspective and experience that corporate leaders can make more effective and complex judgements.

One participant likened the ideal executive team to a professional sporting club, with each member bringing a different mindset. For example:

**P007:** *“You’ve kind of got your super stars, you’ve got your engine room who do all the work, you’ve got a few rookies, you’ve got some veterans. So not just a team of veterans or just a team of superstars. Far more powerful when you’re not clones of each other”.*

Participants recognised the vacuity that can occur in thinking if everyone in the executive is looking at an issue through the same lens. However, it was clear that the upshots of diversity in the boardroom appeared hard to measure beyond differences in perspective and more work needs to be done in highlighting the value that a diverse executive can bring. Among the study sample, the number of positions and titles within the C-suite varied. Variations were not attributed so much to the diversity needed rather positions were dictated based on organisational need. For example, a health-based organisation necessitated a Chief Medical Officer. As P011 stated:

**P011:** *“I think yeah for an executive team you need to look at all of the key functions of delivering an organisation basically, so you’ve got like the money which just like a finance representative, you’ve got staff which is like a workforce or human resources function”.*

Organisational structures varied among the sample, with structure decisions consequently made for enabling a more efficient and capable business. For example, one participant remarked:

**P007:** *“We established a leadership team to oversee the operational management of the company, it was a structure I was familiar with and knew to be effective”.*

This comment suggests that structure is necessary to create a framework with clearly defined reporting relationships, roles and responsibilities, bringing the organisation to a position where they are competitively fit. More than half of the organisations in this study housed structures based on functionality. While some participants cited their current structures to have an outsized impact on success. Findings advocated the need for organisations to be tactically agile capturing opportunities as they arise. For example as P009 and P012 said:

**P009:** *“You just kind of get used to the bureaucracy, the hierarchy of having so many layers, and its juts slowing down productivity. So I think a move towards more of a flatter structure works better operationally”.*

**P012:** *“They’re a very flat structure, that structure is significantly better”.*

The themes resonating in the findings reflect the need for organisations to break away from the traditional structures in favour of cross-functional teaming to facilitate knowledge flows and agility. Interestingly, according to study participants, technical skills are simply the beginning when it comes to securing a position in the executive corridor. Participants consistently stated that once welcomed to the top table, leadership capabilities and business acumen mattered more than functional background.

#### **4.4.3 Essential Skill Set for Corporate Leaders**

Participants placed emphasis on the softer skills such as communication, ability to inspire and motivate others, empathy, strategic thinking, agility, relationship building and collaboration as the transformation change happening in organisations today. For example, P001 and P012 stated:

**P001:** *“So it’s going to be about attitude, about passion it’s going to be about adaptability and flexibility it’s going to be about market acumen its understanding your market whatever it is, whether its mining, IT, health or whatever it is grasping that there is complexity in that market and having some insight into that market, that is going to be a skill set that people are going to have to have so you should be able to transfer from one to another”.*

**P012:** *“You know we get managed on our performance every year and what we can continue to do better in. I think more of the development at this level is around you know leadership style, application. I guess at this level the view is you know if you weren’t confident um technically or operationally then you wouldn’t be in the role now. But you know the areas of development are more around um how can you be more, even more effective leaders, a contributor”.*

Themes that ran consistently through the findings suggest that leadership abilities are more important in the C-suite than the technical capabilities and functional expertise of executives. Based on the results one might expect that organisations have started to reorientate themselves, to favour leadership skills with an increased appetite for executives with a boarder-spectrum of business acumen over those with purely a functional orientation in their top tiers. A trend that may continue that would see executives at the top table having a strong grasp of business fundamentals with more in common with their executive contemporaries than those in the functions they are responsible for. As P007, P005 and P006 mentioned:

**P007:** *“We need the technical skill, if we had lots of choice we’d select on the soft skill”.*

**P005:** *“We’ve gone through lots of iterations of what works and what doesn’t and probably that’s when you just step back and talk about skills sets and things its quiet fascinating, because I don’t think anyone is a specialist in one particular area I think we got our whole general manager group is pretty generalists”.*

**P006:** *“We are all pretty much committed to an organisation wide solution as opposed to um functional”.*

These responses instructing there has been a change in upper echelon behaviour, with executives moving beyond functional roles to an enterprise approach. In this new construct, C-suite executives are better able to identify and seize opportunities that present across and beyond the organisation. According to participants, the ability for executives to take advantage of opportunities is accomplished by a team approach. This sees the C-suite employing a team centric model collaborating as a cross functional team to understand the industry and emergent trends, identifying potential profit pools, all of which are underpinned by adaptability. As P007 and P003 noted:

**P007:** *“You’d probably take team fit um over competence every time I reckon, because competence is actually pretty easy to find in a lot of those roles. I think you need to be nuanced at board level, at the director level”.*

**P003:** *“I think if you look at organisational risk I think someone should risk access the skills that are required to take an organisation forward so if we say we have disruptors in health, whether it is technology or alternatives to hospital base care I think then, so what skill sets do you need at the table to be coming up with those solutions to those disruptions”.*

#### **4.4.4 Organisational Culture**

An important aspect of challenging the legacy of top team composition is organisational culture and CEO influence. Findings from this study highlight that culture plays a significant role in the time, effort and money invested in building an organisations core competencies and leadership talents. For example as two participants stated:

**P003:** *“I am sick of hearing about you know the Facebook case studies, big companies are looking to those and saying we need to be agile, we need to be modern, um I still think culturally and culture is probably still the key component. They are never going to be different because they haven’t truly let go of all the things that dictate culture”.*

**P001:** *“Culture is everything. I know it’s a bit of a truism, but I don’t know if all organisations truly invest in that”.*

Based on the interviews conducted the CEO leads the charge in so many aspects including the culture of the organisation. For example:

**P001:** *“On the grand level of doing things differently the CEO drove the change. The CEO needs to have the vision to say, we can do something much better and he brings to you, so yer it’s a great example he comes to you and says, there are two ways of doing it, you can either go we can keep the status quo and keep our funders happy and keep delivering our services, be efficient, make some changes here and there but keep going okay until the next strategy session comes up. Or he comes to you and goes you know what we can fundamentally change the face of this organisation, here is how I see it happening, but here is the investment that you will have to make, and here are the outcomes we can measure it by”.*

**P002:** *“He talks about servant leadership but he does empower people. He lets them get on with it, but he will expect them to deliver”.*

These comments indicate the personal style of the CEO plays a role in influencing, motivating and unlocking the energy of the top team. Findings suggest that the CEO does not need to have a background in marketing to value the strategic aspects the discipline.

**P001:** *“I think it requires a CEO with that mentality rather than the specifics of marketing. So if you have or sorry are an aspiring marketing person and exec or whatever and you have a CEO that enables that then it will happen, and if you have a CEO who is closed to that idea you know, no no and they want to control everything and I will tell you what to do then I don’t think it matters how good you are as a marketing person you will never get that voice, without that, so um I might be wrong but it would be my view that the enabling CEO so sorry, enabling is a more important characteristics than a specific background”.*

It was clear from the participant’s responses that they believed the days a CEO could succeed through solely authority were over. For example:

**P001:** *“If you surround yourself with people that are really good then you sit there and go, well, this my approach always that I employ people who I think are going to challenge the things that I do and that’s, you have to create the environment where that happens”.*

The need for mutual trust and respect among members of the top team was also referenced. For example:

**P003:** *“If the organisation doesn’t have the right culture I know that I won’t be able to achieve the right things”.*

**P008:** *“I also think in terms of culture you need to have rapport present within the team as this can further add value beyond the individual’s talents and skills”.*



These statements echo the need not only for exceptional individual executives but those dedicated to playing as a team to drive business results. The CEO was cited as responsible for reviewing the priorities for each C-suite spearhead and establishing how each can affect organisational success. As P012 said:

**P012:** *“Were doing a large piece of work about the asset centricity and what’s needed to support the asset and how each of those roles really play a critical role”.*

#### **4.5 Organisational Performance and Success**

Organisations measure performance in many ways, such as the optimisation of resources, efficacy of processes, delivering a return to shareholders, financial performance and more. Richard et al., (2009) describes organisational performance as the achievement of specific outcomes, compared with the intended outputs. Organisational performance may well determine if an organisation is considered successful or not. When asked to identify the key drivers of organisation success, participant responses reaffirmed the need to be responsive to customers, innovative, balancing culture with operations and ensuring both leadership and organisational parameters are tightly aligned with strategy. As P001 stated:

**P001:** *“I know the way that they operate, they have a very values driven culture as well. Okay I get that they have a bottom line component but every little decision takes into account the quad ripple bottom line if you like, of patient experience, the economics of it, the finance of the situation, brand effect and whatever else you might throw in there. So this is how all good organisations should work any way to be fair. Every organisation it doesn’t matter if their health or not, they should operate with all those components in mind”.*

**P009:** *“Trying to win the war by generating more activity rather than screwing down costs”.*

Participants recognised it is not always a case of cutting costs to meet profit crunches. That there is a need to create an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand for sustained organisational advantage. For example, P006 noted:

**P006:** *“If um if we are not looking after the participant or um sorry members etc. that’s where it’s going to have an impact on our participation rates our revenue that we can generate, it’s going to have an impact on um good will as well right and government funding, as in the end because what we do has an impact in society”.*

Responses indicated that creativity and innovation play a role in protecting organisations from being sensitive to market fluctuations. Conversely, one participant was quick to mention:

**P009:** *“Tremendous opportunity to do something that’s not standard, there’s an opportunity to run a tremendously different model, they’ll probably just get a version of what everyone one else has got and that would be a real shame”.*

This comment suggests that innovation sometimes is not enough, and there needs to be someone at the top table that can take an idea and commercialise it in the marketplace. Participants articulated the key drivers of organisational success were largely attributed to the strategic choices made by those in the upper echelons. When asked to detail measures of success participants undisputedly replied with business growth and revenue.

#### **4.5.1 Growth and Revenue Generation**

Interestingly responses demonstrated a universal craving for an improvement on traditional methods in assessing organisational performance and success. Metrics that matter transcend the traditional balance sheet, according these participants:

**P006:** *“It goes beyond just the numbers it is also about how people feel about the brand how connected they feel”.*

**P003:** *“So what isn’t calculated in there is the erosion of trust with others. So you get my friends, the people, myself, my trust in an organisation like that begins to get eroded. And trying to put a financial metric around trust is hard, but I think it’s critical”.*

**P005:** *“Then the other thing is there is a lot of stuff that is measurable, and there is a hell of a lot that isn’t”.*

These particular themes allude to a situation where executives are faced with making decisions concerning growth and revenue when there is insufficient data available. As well as being presented with contributions that are too tortuous to the actual value deprived. Participants felt that all C-suite leaders needed to be able to link strategy to value, not just the marketing arena.

Responses indicated that the growth leadership mindset was not only highly valued in today’s organisations but it was also perceived as critical. Participants perceived executives needed to have the ability to look beyond where the growth currently is in their business models to where it will be tomorrow. Participant responses were redolent in citing that resources needed to be in place to support this growth journey. For example:

**P001:** *“We need to be proactive rather than passive in the market. So the industry has gone from build it and they will come to we need to be proactive and take action to drive business towards us”.*

**P003:** *“In small organisations you don’t talk about governance, you have those components but you are talking about growth”.*

Participants held that success relies heavily on an organisations ability to keep finding and pursuing new sources of growth. However, budget processes did not necessarily reflect this. Indicative that traditional inputs and standard approaches are no longer fit for task. One participant was quick to point out that corporate performance was invariably linked with marketing aspects of revenue, competition, volume and pricing remarking:

**P012:** *“It’s integral to our business it is how revenue is generated”. They fundamentally improve the outlook of the business”.*

While the participant acknowledges marketing’s role in driving the business's growth agenda, affirming the idea that marketing fundamentally improves the outlook of a

business. Another participant found it more difficult to connect the dots between marketing and growth:

*P007: "We had been reviewing our growth strategies, looking at ways to expand our client network beyond our existing client base, attracting new ones. We thought we needed a more prominent online presence looking at our social media and digital platforms, so we spent some of our marketing dollars here. When asking clients why they choose us, most of them are previous clients or come via word of mouth. Actually the number of new clients we gained from an enhanced digital presence was actually minimum, so then your left asking the questions was it worth it".*

Responses were not all doom and gloom, another participant acknowledged a shift in organisational attitude and behaviour when it comes to marketing and pursuing growth objectives:

*P003: "When I think I am at my best is in a growth organisation, um because it values the marketing skill set very highly. Versus an established organisation which the marketing skill set is at the later end".*

The themes across these responses indicate that organisations committed to an engine of growth are underpinned by an operating model that is centred on organisational alignment, attracting and retaining appropriate talent and optimising marketing capabilities. Participant responses also associated growth with an organisational constitution comprising agility, capability and leadership mindset. In addition to recognising the customer experience as a convincing driver of evolution and revenue.

#### **4.5.2. Short-Term versus Long-Term Strategies and Metrics**

Findings demonstrated that executives are charged with many trade-offs in the C-suite. Variances were attributed to where executives placed more value on particular priorities. In some instances floundering under the burden of vested interests. For example, higher risk initiatives may have longer payback periods but could serve longer growth goals better. Therefore, executives are sometimes tasked with competing time horizons, choosing

strategies that are either leading for the short-term or leading for the long-term. As P003 stated:

**P003:** *“A key driver here is organisational score cards, so most score cards will have financial performance and sales performance which is great but both of these things are lag indicators. So the lead indicator for me, which um is trying to ensure my organisation is interested and concerned with, if I can’t build awareness and consideration and build engagement I am never going to change the pathway for sales performance. So those are the lead indicators but to have them sitting there on a score card and have an organisation understand their importance is pretty rare. Unless you get those lead indicators right and get people to take a long-term view around lead indicators it’s hard”.*

While P004 stated:

**P004:** *“Unfortunately I think the increase in science around the bottom of the funnel has caused an in balance in terms of short-term and long-term investment. You remind people on long-term investment and brand building and balancing it with short-term investment”.*

Respondents clearly acknowledge the distinction between short-term and long-term measures and the importance placed on an executive’s ability to ensure measures are suitably knitted to organisational strategy and decision-making processes. Another participant added:

**P003:** *“You know it’s the ones that have the bravery or consistency of performance that take a long-term view and go out and tell their shareholders that profit is going to take a bit of a hit this quarter, but don’t worry because in three years’ time it will be different, that’s what we are building towards and it takes a really brave CEO that can do”.*

It is obvious from the findings that executives find it challenging to make decisions on initiatives where the return on investment will be seen at time into the future. Participants believing the consumer experience as a case in point, it is a long-term metric where returns

are not reflected immediately. Consequently making it difficult to convince those executive members who persist in the rote application of financial orientated metrics to support their decision-making. Highlighting the need for a rethink in the way organisations define and assess corporate performance. Therefore, executives are more confident in making decisions on a wider diversification of measurement systems and time horizons. Otherwise, the risk is that organisations may be hemmed into making decisions to release short-term benefits. Decisions, that might not necessarily take into account whether or not it is able to sustain its current trajectory or if there is potential to be gained from a different strategy over the longer-term. For example:

**P001:** *“If you are too wedded to how that happens then you are blind to what your organisation actually needs”.*

**P010:** *“You can’t do something long-term in 12 months”.*

Poignant comments such as these signify the latent demand to step away from conventional, short-term intra-organisational thinking in order to take in the bigger picture. Broadening executive thinking beyond immediate profit maximisation

#### **4.6 Conceptual Framework**

Study results depict the reasons why there is a paucity of marketers in the C-suite, and a trend in stagnation at middle management in Australian organisations. The rudimentary concerns originating from the data portrayed are the lived experiences of senior level executives. It is the lived experience of the phenomenon that is the subject of this research. Phenomenological analysis of the interviews captured three predominant themes significant to marketing’s representation in the TMT, organisational performance, manifestations of marketing and the interplay of dynamics in the executive suite. Together with the experiences of executives, these findings represented a unique opportunity to harness stakeholder management and upper echelons theories to expand scholarly conversations and knowledge of marketing’s strategic influence within the organisation.

It is through analysis of the findings that the researcher has conceived a framework that brings to light why marketing is underrepresented at the apex of an organisation, documenting the specific challenges experienced as well as opportunities to significantly change marketing's trajectory.

In the corporate landscape, the danger zone is the gap between what marketing expects to and knows it can achieve and what the organisation believes it to be capable of achieving and consequently how it is resourced. The results suggest potential gaps lies in four different areas, the model below depicts these gaps and ways to help close them drawing on the relevant theories.

**Figure 4.1 Marketing's Move to the Boardroom**

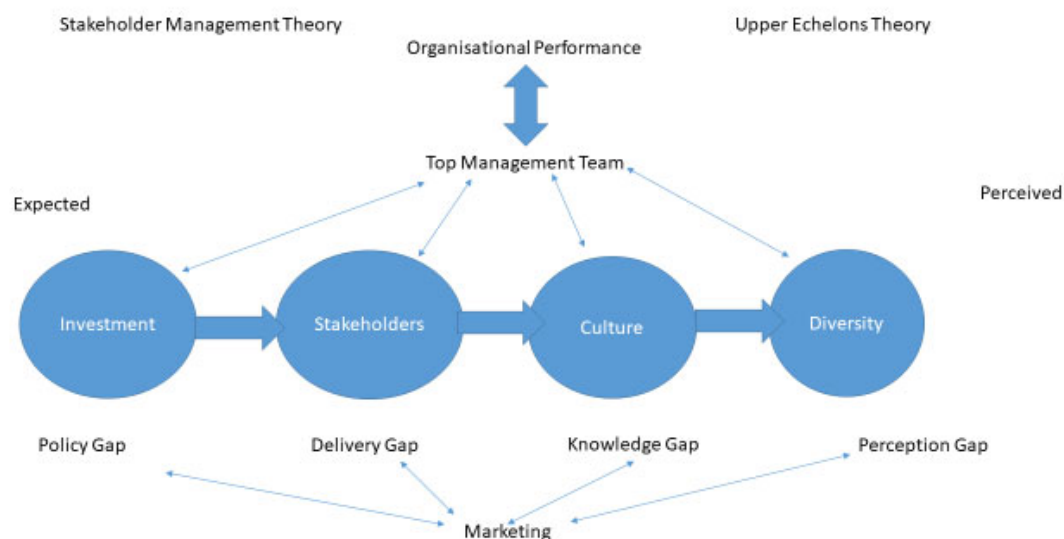


Figure 4.1 involves the identification of four distinctive gaps that can be used to explain the challenges marketers face in gaining a seat at the table. At the same time, this gap analysis model is suggestive of strategies, which optimises upper echelons and stakeholder management theories to project and utilise marketing resources to bestow the best organisational results possible. Organisations that underpin their decision-making on the foundations of stakeholder relationships and the diversity sitting around the boardroom table, inherently are provided with broader measures of organisational effectiveness, that

extend beyond traditional financial metrics as the sole determinant of success (Engelen et al., 2013; Kotter, 2008). These will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Five.

The first gap is the policy gap reflecting that marketing is considered a cost to be managed rather than a strategic investment and therefore it is not allocated adequate resources to achieve beyond tactical campaigns. It would appear, those residing in C-suite positions find it difficult to isolate and articulate the specific attributes that the marketing discipline possesses at the top tiers. In particular, the core competencies of collaboration, communication and the ability to manage and navigate complex stakeholder relationships, all of which should be considered an investment in improving an organisations competitive positioning, and in which marketing is adroit (Ambler & Roberts, 2008; Bennett, 2009; Porter, 2010).

The second is the delivery gap whereby organisations are predominantly focused on strategies that have a bigger impact on shareholder returns, sometimes at the expense of other stakeholders who also have the ability to impact organisational value and success. Findings suggest that the C-suite is lacking in a respectable awareness of alternative measures of organisation success, such as non-financial performance metrics that can positively influence value. For example from the accumulation of intangible assets such as social capital and stakeholder satisfaction (Berman et al., 1999; Freeman, 2010).

The gap of knowledge reflects the misalignment between what marketing believes it can achieve and what the organisation thinks it can. Culturally, customer expectations and leaderships understanding of those expectations are different. Common explanations provided for this divide involve the feeble transmission and appropriate examination of all information that is available. It would appear that the C-suite is just not well equipped without the marketing function at the helm to undertake the in-depth analysis and appraisal of brand, markets and customers. Arguably this is what is required if an organisation is to keep pace with a constantly changing landscape (Ambler & Roberts, 2008; Neilsen 2010a; Tubbe, 2010).



The final gap is the perception gap between what is perceived to be in the top management team and what the organisation actually has. While recognition exists, it is important to house a wide variety of functions and perspectives in the TMT, results reveal a substantial amount of experience, is centred on few functional areas. Handicapping the ability of the TMT to derive broad strategic plans with substantial consideration to stakeholders. Thus, those organisations that harness the interdisciplinary relationships residing within the TMT ensure strategic decisions do not sacrifice intangible assets and long-term prospects for short-term gain (Germann et al., 2015; Green & Ryan, 2005).

#### **4.7 Chapter Conclusion**

The intention of this chapter was to outline the phenomenological findings that emerged from the interviews, paving the way to make further sense of the data, in reply to the research questions. The analysis provided insight into the lived experiences of executives, and the challenges faced by marketers in gaining entry into the executive leadership team. Marketers have not been traditionally welcomed into executive management teams. Subsequently bestowing a reluctance to provide marketing practitioners with appropriate levels of influence and control. The challenges and opportunities identified by participants were considered through the lens of upper echelons and stakeholder management theories to connect and advance scholarly conversation.

Participants provided new insights as to the obstacles marketing encounters in today's organisations. Many looking at the challenges as a compass, representing future opportunities in which marketing can use to anchor itself firmly in the upper echelons of organisations. Results told of the burden the definition of marketing has on the discipline. The widespread pigeonholing of marketing confined to the remits of advertising and promotion builds hesitancy in the upper echelons on what it can achieve strategically. Particularly when executive decisions were cited as being shaped by past practices and managerial backgrounds. The higher priority historically given to finance did not always offer the full story and there was increasing appetite for non-financial measures to fill in the gap. The view was not that marketing metrics lacked utility; it was more of a case that management do not know what or how to measure. Therefore, marketing found it increasingly difficult to communicate how it was contributing effectively to performance.

Once functional managers crossed the chasm and entered the top ranks less attention was paid to titles and background.

Findings produced new perspectives on the diversity combination in the TMT, inclusive of strategic marketing capabilities and how to capitalise on them. With the business ecosystem, continuing to evolve and organisations susceptible to social influence and backlash. There is a need to look beyond economic issues and embrace stakeholder capitalism. Those organisations that continue to resist may well find themselves on the wrong side of history. The structure of an organisation can unduly influence the relationship between marketing and the executive. Opportunities for organisations to achieve breakthrough improvements in performance may come by welcoming the marketing discipline to the apex of the organisation with open arms. To play the role as organisational visionary, matching marketing insights to emerging trends and strategic opportunities. Results suggest that marketing-led growth strategies may be where the new heart of value creation lies. Therefore, marketing should not be handicapped at middle management. The conceptual framework explains why marketing has been marginalised and what can be done in the future. The framework educes further discussion in the next chapter.

# Chapter 5 Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction

The intention of this study is to deepen the understanding of the professed obstacles marketers are confronted with in gaining a seat in the executive suite. Seeking to further advance insights in what marketing practitioners can and will need to do to increase their chances of being admitted passage to the golden corridor of the executive. Firstly, this chapter reviews the research that has been conducted, with a concentration on absorbing the results of the data analysis (Chapter 4) through a detailed discussion of the major findings in unification with the literature review (Chapter 2) and methodology (Chapter 3). Secondly, this chapter presents the various implications yielded in the study in terms of both theoretical and managerial contributions. Lastly, the limitations of the study are addressed which can be directed to future studies. Closing with final remarks.

## 5.2 Research Questions

The main research aim was to explore the paucity of marketers in the executive boardroom by means of a qualitative study. Drawing on the lived experiences of executives to describe the phenomenon. The extant findings of this study bestow a contemporary outlook of how marketers are representing in today's organisations, when compared with the pronouncements contained in the literature review. The relevance of these findings suggest a new paradigm where the marketing misalignment is corrected and it no longer remains the elephant in the boardroom. The reoccurrence of themes uncovered in analysis shape the discussion in relation to each research question.

### 5.2.1 Reasons for Marketing's Continued Under-Representation in the Boardroom

Marketing has been positioned in the literature as the elephant in the boardroom. The one member underperforming when compared to its executive peers. There has been a reluctance to address the issue of marketing's underperformance, with board brush strokes painting a bleak picture of failure to talk the language of the boardroom, to be accountable and demonstrate value (Abernathy et al., 2013; Mattsson et al., 2006; Nath, & Mahajan; 2008; O'Sullivan & Butler, 2010). However, no elephant should be unmentionable, and this

emblematic idiom represents an enormous amount of topical conversation in scholarly circles. However, the focus it would seem is far too constricted to allow them to see that marketing is falling prey to victimisation, rather than one that serves the best interest of the organisation. Certainly, there is a variety of other possibilities that need to be considered when examining marketing's underrepresentation in the top tiers (Brooksbank et al., 2010; Carver, 2009; Gilliat & Cuming, 2017).

#### **5.2.1.2 Qualifications**

It is no secret that marketers have often taken second place to other disciplines when it comes to strategic decision making and influence in the boardroom. This is naïve and certainly not sustainable in the competitive 'customer age'. Marketing practitioners must have a central voice on the choices organisations render. Equally, everyone is an apparent expert on the customer and advertising campaigns. Expert judgements safeguarded as no additional credentials exist that sanction marketing as the authority, therefore marketing's professional identity often comes into question. No one appears to question the advice of an accountant or a medical professional. Both requiring further levels of education beyond undergraduate degrees to be welcomed onto the top rungs of the corporate ladder. One might suggest that more rigour is needed beyond tertiary level qualifications for marketing to be regarded as an expert in the field, propelling them to the upper echelons of the organisation. For example, in healthcare when patients are searching for a surgeon they often look for one that is the most suitably qualified in terms of professional experience and education.

Previous responsibilities undertaken combined with further training marketers obtain will affect the knowledge they have and bring to their current roles and organisations, which may influence how they perform in their career trajectory. Therefore, additional qualifications may help in building marketing's strategic brand, together with practical experience to secure positions in the C-suite, or at the very least aid acknowledge that marketing has true expertise, expertise that is unique and not easily imitated by others. Like all members of the executive, marketing needs to possess a very clear understanding of what they bring to the table and communicate it widely. This includes a broader exposure

to the organisational enterprise and a deep understanding how strategy, innovation, sales, finance, operations and marketing come together to drive profitable growth.

#### **5.2.1.3 Definition, Titles and Structure**

There are various adaptations in the corporate title hierarchy with C-level titles at the apex. Variations are often mandated by particular organisational structures and/or industries. Those awarded C-level titles are comprised of people who historically have been considered 'specialists' possessing the main responsibilities and duties for that distinct vertical function. The health of marketing's C-suite position has come into question, labelled by some academics as obsolete (Carver, 2009; Gilliat & Cuming, 2017; Smith et al., 2009; Webster et al., 2003). What has not be accounted for, is organisations reacting efficiently to the current climate they find themselves and rather than a rampant disappearance of marketing, new executive positions have been created and new headings attributed to the marketing function. Which sees the amalgamation of marketing with other functions such as customer experience, business development and innovation. Consequently, marketing may no longer be retained in the title, to marketing's detriment in its quest to be welcomed into the C-suite. There is no doubt that categorising positions according to titles has and will continue to play a role in organisational status, and what is perceived as imperative to and by the organisation.

Adding to the confusion of marketing's relevance at the zenith of the organisation is a lack of clarity surrounding its role and purpose. Underpinned by a non-existence, universally accepted definition. With so many iterations of definitions, it is fair to say the organisational audience has stopped listening and marketing is stuck in ground hog day (Gronroos, 2006). All these insights would be fruitless unless marketing can persuade organisations of its strategic prowess and subsequently bestowed a correlating title. Making a stand, setting clear parameters and expectations around what it is and what it can achieve. By doing so organisations will reach the realisation that unless they embrace marketing in the upper echelons they risk spending perpetuity in the same place, seeing the same people do the same thing every day (Tubbe, 2010).

Organisational legacy has played a role in marketing's inconspicuous positioning, thus executive recruitment viewed as a habitual process, an uninspiring practice that is now certainly out of date (Quigley & Hambrick; 2015). For example, a Director of Operations leaves and a new Director of Operations is appointed. Little thought is given to the outside environment to decide what is working and what is not in the inner sanctum. Typically, TMT's have seen strategic dominance of disciplines such as accountants and lawyers, and this trend continues. Previous studies have alluded to the background of an organisations CEO as a precursor to marketing's ability or inability as the case may be to climb up the ranks. For example, if the CEO has a background in marketing there would be an increased chance of marketing representation around the table (Finkelstein et al., 2009). However, it would appear it is not so much the functional background of the CEO that asserts influence as its leadership profile. The relationship between creative, transformational leadership and the manifestations of marketing. The internal parameters of strategic flexibility, participatory decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and understanding of consumer insights also playing a key role. What CEO's pay attention to is rarely driven by a mechanical quest for economic optimisation. Choices are made on personalised interpretations of what is critical to organisational success. CEO's with an empathy towards cross-functional collaboration, an appetite for strategies that generate profitable growth, the desire to motivate and inspire an entire organisation to want to deliver, and understand how the pieces and parts of the organisation fit together to achieve excellent execution, are more likely to value the marketing skill set (Pearce & Zahra, 1991; Vera & Crossan, 2004). So while we are seeing organisations embracing the mantle for change when it comes to replacing the monarch of the executive and those serving. It is imperative to remember that many organisations have entrenched cultures and long legacies, with decades of alumni sitting in the wings ready to ascend to CEO. Marketers need the temperament to work hard to build a strong advisory footing with the CEO and other executive leaders. Translating insights that wield substantial influence so that the organisation truly appreciates marketing's strategic role. Consequently, less divide and controversy exists when marketing takes its rightful seat at the table.

#### **5.2.1.4 Accountability and Profitability**

It has been widely cited in the literature that marketing is incapable of successfully executing accountability measures, subsequently failing to have a profound impact on profitability. Hence, this is the reason attributed to marketing's struggle for a position at the helm of strategic decision-making metrics (Clark et al., 2014; Nath, 2006; Nath & Mahajan, 2008). Marketing continues to clutch the extinguisher preventing the fire from becoming uncontrollable, tasked with demonstrating how it contributes effectively to performance arduous. Largely, as the organisations in which it exists are not orientated in a way to capitalise on it, for example organisations may have valuable marketing resources that are underwriting bottom line performances. However, they are structured in a way that the extracted value is not immediately obvious, because a separation of ownership and control transpires. Organisations have high expectations of the marketing function and expect them to be held accountable for results, yet they are not placing marketing in a leading role. Numerous organisations position marketers to concentrate primarily if not solely on communications. Meanwhile the upstream decisions associated with marketing strategy including the financing are decided by other people, not at all associated with marketing. Poor performance is then quickly misattributed to the marketing function yet credit is taken by executives when outcomes are favourable. It may be said that it is not marketing metrics that lack utility but those who are tasked with measurement. Marketing needs to be given the opportunity to take a commanding role at the table. Converting data and insights into meaningful results, so that they can be measured and interpreted appropriately.

Organisations have a tendency to look at the cold, hard, black and white numbers reflected on the balance sheet. Cutting costs to increase profit margins and improve efficiencies. With not enough attention paid and value put on the intangibles such as customer service, stakeholder engagement and brand equity as determinants of organisational success (Abernathy et al., 2013; Joshi & Gimenez, 2014; McDonald, 2006; Sheth & Sisodia, 2005). A situation that is surely by now considered counterproductive. One only needs to take Rio Tinto cutting ties with its CEO and two senior executives as an example. Its ill-fated actions destroying two momentous Aboriginal rock shelters saw the mining giant bow down to censure. Even shareholders loudly voiced grave trepidations surrounding executive

culpability. Demonstrating that accountability should not only be judged by numbers and those receiving dividends. While the blasts made it possible for Rio Tinto to retrieve \$135m of iron ore, it was at the expense of international condemnation and damaged reputation (Rio Tinto Board Review, 2020; Ben-Meir, 2020; Wensing, 2021).

Organisations such as Rio Tinto rely heavily on social license to operate and the impact of ignoring the stakeholder balance sheet in favour of numbers will continue to have far-reaching consequences on worldwide operations for some time to come. If marketing was involved in Rio Tinto's high-level discussions about Juukan, they may have been able to advert the danger of destroying their brand value they have spent years building through socially responsible practices. Simply by scrutinising the stakeholder sensitive issues in the same way a financial statement may have been. If this example teaches us anything, it is the predictability of revenue streams must be viewed from the lenses of customer value and brand equity. They are arguably the most important measures of organisational value. When your stakeholders are satisfied, they have a domino effect on competitive positioning, long-term value and ultimate success (Morgan et al., 2019). It is therefore, the intangible return on relationship that is perhaps the biggest metric that demonstrates marketing's contribution.

Another issue concerning marketing's accountability and profitability stems from resource constraints, when resources are tighter fewer options exist. By default, the organisation becomes reactive as opposed to proactive. Typically, the marketing function is expected to understand the external market better than any other function and translate this insight into growth-creating strategies. They are then expected to lead the organisation to deliver, often at middle management level. A clear indication that organisations are not making it important enough. Essentially, as marketing is seen as a cost not an investment, both human resources and budget to deliver on strategies is limited (Verhoeff & Leeflang, 2009). Therefore, marketing are heavily reliant on their inherent creativity and innovative nature to do more with less. Absurdly their performance is than compared with other functions that are suitably resourced. The consequent of this view is that there is a disproportionate impact on organisational outcomes and marketing is not making the grade. The problem fundamentally boils down to an under valuation of what the CMO can contribute. An



increasing gap lies in the reasons for which the role of CMO was created and what the job actually needs.

All functions within an organisation are tasked with objectives to make the appropriate contribution to overarching goals. The trick is harnessing the right metric to capture the contribution. Marketing is very much a finger on the pulse type of discipline, relying on organisational agility to capitalise on market opportunities. Consequently, forward thinking and cumulative measures of organisational performance are more fitting in evaluating marketing's impact in the executive. Traditional accounting based measures are at best lag indicators and are not well suited, as they contain no information about the future value of the organisation (Gronroos, 2006; Whitley et al., 2018). An institutionalised impatience persists with an impetus on driving quick sales over the value in relationships that demonstrate benefits over the longer-term. Organisations and executives alike need to reengineer their view of marketing as a core driver of growth and not as a mere tactic to drive quick sales. The key to retaining and attracting customers and stakeholder confidence is giving marketing the influence to fund their visions. Combined with an organisational wide willingness to support calculated risks marketing takes to pursue organisational goals. Only then will the order of magnitude return on investment be apparent (Gronroos, 2006; Tubbe 2010; Whitley et al., 2018)

#### **5.2.1.5 Value**

Marketing's visibility within the organisation makes it inherently taxing to demonstrate its value. Given senior marketers are predominantly bookended in middle management; attention is frequently diverted to tactical campaigns into which they had no strategic oversight. Globally a significant variance exists between marketing's accepted organisational value when compared to its functional counterparts. Credibility in the boardroom has historically been measured in hard numbers. Earning a spot alongside the CEO and CFO came down to marketing being able to justify spend by impact on revenue. Marketing's value transcends bottom of the funnel metrics and it is a trap fraught with danger when organisations become focused on a piecemeal approach to measuring value. However, it would seem that traditional inputs of value are no longer fit for task. As value

is becoming more widely recognised to take many forms (Ambler & Roberts, 2008; Baldwin & Clark, 1992; Morgan et al., 2019)

Afterpay is a case in point as it is simply not possible to assess this company on conventional metrics. Despite Afterpay not being in a position to pay dividends initially its share price continued to skyrocket, leaving behind even the most astute investors. A business model born out of consumerism for the consumer, with repeat customers accounting for almost 90 per cent of sales in the 2020 financial year (Huang et al., 2020; Mandel & Long, 2021). Signifying organisations should concentrate on creating and building a business that customers love. Essentially expanding value metrics to take into consideration a range of non-traditional and unique data sources. This in and of itself may evoke bold discussions at the executive round table. Arguably one that needs to be had.

There is so much that marketing contributes and does do that is valuable. For example, being responsible for driving revenue, possessing the foresight and agility to respond to evolving markets and shifting priorities, exceeding customer value, managing high quality two-way relationships and reputation as well as building better and more carefully coordinated touch points across functions. Marketing needs to secure consensus among executives on which marketing activities are worth measuring and how marketing should create economic value. Highlighting the spectrum of opportunity costs, potential risks and returns. However, it should not always fall on marketing's shoulders to come up with creative ways to demonstrate its value. Every director needs to be tangibly adding value and visibly contributing. As the co-founder of Hewlett-Packard, David Packard famously said, "Marketing is too important to be left to the marketing department" and it needs to be at the helm of corporate strategy and decision-making (Chernev, 2018; Swaim, 2011; Webster, 1992).

In summarising the research question, it is evident that marketing still and continues to create value for organisations. Today's C-suite leaders have many options when it comes to solving key challenges, and one respondents believed that marketing needs to be involved in. Which will rely heavily on being able to reach executive level agreement on how

marketing creates value. Just as coaches make changes to their training and game plans come game day, organisations need to be able to do the same. How an executive is perceived in terms of adding value affects their professional capital and their legitimacy within the organisation. The C-suite will only pay attention and respond to measures that reflect premeditated goals for the organisation. Therefore, participants recognised that marketing needs to come up with practical steps they could put in place to remedy value performance issues within their organisations. Such as identifying advocates of marketing within the TMT to help them effectively manipulate and increase their ability to attract support from stakeholders in their endeavours to ascend the corporate hierarchy

### **5.2.2 What can Marketing Practitioners do to enter the Boardroom?**

The nucleus of the TMT is the optimum realisation of organisational goals and objectives with and through other people. Once at this level, the top team face the challenge of managing and prioritising their time, intentions and resources so that strategies can be implemented successfully. Previous studies have concluded that the executive becomes accountable for the success or failure of an organisation through the decisions that they make (Mintzberg, 1988; Wowak et al., 2017). Whether it be a success or failure, it is shared among the group, not one person is exclusively responsible. As reflected in the study findings, a university degree, years of service and experience within an industry are not enough to qualify you for an executive position. Findings in this study illuminate we may in fact be witnessing another management paradigm shift in organisations today. With assumptions about leadership more in favour of the softer skills than the technical ones (Bennett, 2009). Collectively participants felt that communication, candour, passion and teamwork were the fundamental skills needed for growth in the capacity to lead an organisation. With this came improved performance individually, as teams and as an organisation, improved communication, improved morale, and the development of an organisational culture that excelled. This shift in collectively held assumptions is good news for marketing in the quest to take up a position in the C-suite. With the glass ceiling cracking there is a chance for everybody to make it to the top instead of a few

### **5.2.2.1 The Trusted Advisor**

For marketers resolute in gaining a seat in the executive they need to make themselves indispensable as a trusted advisor. Hence, their stripes and skills are noticed, widely in the executive. To the point it is viewed marketing are better inside the circle than out. To be regarded and singled out as a source of respected advice, marketing needs to establish a position of being able to provide support across a broad range of commercial matters, not just their own specialism. Building trust can only be done by demonstrating and proving trustworthiness over time (Morgan et al., 2019). Every interaction with members of the TMT is marketing's opportunity to provide irreplaceable advice that advances the upper echelons perception of marketing as a source of valuable insight. To develop credibility and capability in the boardroom marketing must validate that it understands the purists of the organisation. By clearly discussing connection with cause and being candid about what it can and cannot do. Educating and convincing the TMT to take an elongated outlook where marketing ventures are concerned, rather than a quick fix, short-term prospect. Signifying a deep comprehension of how strategy, innovation, finance, operations and marketing come together to drive profitable growth (Gronroos 2006; Morgan et al., 2019).

It is paramount for marketing, necessitated by organisations for marketing to clearly articulate and illuminate to members of the C-suite what is possible. Harmonising rational long-term strategies with nimbleness in the interim. Aligning both boardroom and marketing prophecies. The importance of storytelling in the boardroom has never been so important in determining marketing's future fate. Marketing needs to take executives on the journey from the positive impact that marketing has on sales, financial performance, stakeholder relationships and the customer experience to the progressive influence it yields in strategic decision-making (Boyd et al, 2010; Germann et al., 2015).

### **5.2.2.2 The Customer Champion**

In the advance towards the 'Holy Grail', marketing needs to take ownership of the dynamics of demand creation and the customer. So many organisations cite consumer centricity and that everyone has responsibility for the customer. Yet, if that were true Forbes would not be able to keep up with publishing their organisational ranked, customer satisfaction index.

Findings reflect a situation of too many 'Indians' and not enough 'Chiefs' that the customer is falling on deaf ears. Which is to an organisation's detriment. If no one is tasked with overarching responsibility of the customer, failing to maintain a pulse check, not only is the risk that an organisations loses sight of their customer base, they may lose them completely. For organisations to succeed, they need to create and meet customer demand. Ultimately, without a customer there can be no business (Germann et al., 2015).

The marketing mindset has always been customer-focused, building future cash flow through the monetisation of delivering customer value. Traditionally marketing was solely dedicated to the pursuit of customer acquisition. Hence, why marketing is still thought to be synonymous with advertising. However, as findings suggest organisations today seek growth as tantamount to success. Requiring organisations to not only obtain customers but to also keep them. Thus, delivering customer experiences that they value and stimulate them to continue to devote their resources to the organisation, time and time again.

Marketing needs to step up and take the central role in being the steward of the customer and the orchestrator of experiences. Leading the charge in understanding the outside world and communicating what that means to the organisation internally. Given the fluctuating forces of the market, changing behaviours and expectations of customers, direct-to-consumer business models taking a stronger hold, it only makes sense that marketing needs a seat at the table. Marketing is one of the only disciplines that can help advantage data to speak to the key dynamics of the organisation and keep the voice of the customer at the centre of C-suite conversations and decision-making. Whichever direction an organisation chooses to move in, whether it be a new product or service, innovation of a brand it will have limited value if it's not connected to or indeed driven by customer needs. Marketing provides the key to merging demand creation and monetisation to create holistic value for the organisation (Boyd et al., 2010).

### **5.2.2.3 Stakeholder Capitalism**

Increasingly, it is not just the customers that are demanding more from today's organisations but an entire raft of stakeholders expect their needs to be taken into

consideration. Their voices becoming louder and louder, until they can no longer be ignored. Marketing's native skills of possessing a deep understanding of relationship management, along with its boundary spanning, analytical, commercial and technical skills will go far in helping marketers slowly but assuredly win the credibility battle in the boardroom. 'The Age of the Customer' is ending as we enter and transition to 'the Age of Stakeholder Capitalism'. A universal shift towards purposeful operations and responsible entrepreneurship. A move that challenges entrenched organisational assumptions about shareholder primacy. This new reality is one that marketing is well placed to face. Marketing must make the most of this opening, using it as another opportunity to play a leadership role in the future face of the organisation (Germann et al., 2015).

Marketing must exert effort to herald a sharper focus on stakeholder governance that permeates the entire organisation. Utilising its well-established boundary spanning capabilities and trusted advisory position to promote and be the steward of all stakeholders. Enabling executives to identify and understand the sources of value that can be leveraged from collaborative relationships with every stakeholder. This may well be met with reluctance initially as organisations come to terms with endorsing an approach that balances short and long-term interests for the benefit of all its constituents. A marked change from exclusively prioritising the maximisation of shareholder wealth. However, one that is necessary to maintain a well-regarded reputation and the highest standards of business integrity.

Organisations are faced with a myriad of challenges daily, that threaten and put pressure on stakeholder's trust in the organisation and its leadership. Thus, marketing must be instilled in the C-suite, vocal in decision making to ensure strategies are aligned with stakeholder preferences and license to operate. Data is the new currency in the boardroom in this regard and one that provides a means for marketing to align insights with the goals of stakeholders and that of the organisation. The role marketing plays in legitimising stakeholders using the wealth of information it has available, will help to facilitate a new vision of power play (Hillebrand et al., 2015). With organisations rapidly recognising that the traditional models of TMT's are fast fracturing, it will not be surprising to see marketing emerging as the new organisational leader.

#### **5.2.2.4 Performance Metrics**

It is no longer deemed acceptable organisational behaviour to put shareholders and profits before and at the expense of everything else. The emphasis on conventional financial metrics is hampering organisational capacity to consider and evaluate stakeholder interests. New performance measurements are needed that are robust, fit for purpose and cover stakeholder governance responsibilities. These measurements are paramount in capturing marketing's contribution (Hanssens & Pauwels, 2016; Hillebrand et al., 2015). Organisational success is reliant on long-term partnerships as opposed to arm length transactions. Therefore, organisational performance metrics need to reflect the intangibles associated with relationships. Traditional accounting based measurements are inadequate in measuring intangible, non-financial assets such as brand equity and stakeholder relationships. These intangibles are becoming the driving forces in sustained competitive advantage and organisational wealth creation (Morgan et al., 2019; Whitler et al., 2020).

Organisations need to commit to serving the interests of all stakeholders. Putting into practice metrics that go beyond numbers, capturing how people feel and are connected to the brand and the organisation. "What gets measured gets managed" is an organisational fundamental. Hence, the introduction of new metrics need to be able to be tracked to be credible. Marketing is particularly apt in recognising how executive decision-making affects stakeholders. This clear line of sight enables marketing to identify what needs to be delivered in order to meet and exceed those needs. How the actual delivery takes place is what creates value and that is what should be measured. Organisations would benefit from marketing in the upper echelons not only ensuring stakeholder expectations are met but they are measured. Which may mean going beyond predictive, analytical ways of working and embracing more discovery and experimentation. It is generating stakeholder value and measuring it that will help marketing build the trust and confidence of the C-suite.

### **5.2.2.5 The Upper Echelons**

The two major trends playing out in today's TMTs provide the real possibility for marketing to be greeted with open arms and a marching band into the inner sanctum. The first is the conversations are changing from cost containment to growth (Whitler et al., 2018). For so long marketing has been penalised and deprived of their ability to contribute in the form of innovative and original ideas. As often, the transformation of sources of customer insights into a holistic picture of opportunity meant entering an uncertain environment. One that was hampered by habitual executives, who were staunchly risk adverse and rarely looked at disruption or challenges in biases as an opportunity. Now in an increasingly competitive environment an organisations survival may actually hinge on chasing the open white space that marketing has been advocating for. If organisations are resolute in continuing to be competitive, they have no choice but to bring marketing into the boardroom. To ensure they identify and keep pace with the changing nature of stakeholder demands (Hillebrand et al., 2015).

Marketing brings a diversity of perspective to the boardroom that has been a missing part of the equation for so long. Marketing not only understands but is also prepared to challenge the current paradigm. It is the different skills and perspectives that are directly connected to critical decision making that enhance an organisations ability to drive innovation and evaluate opportunities for growth. Marketing executives are knowledgeable in developing plans and strategies that diminish contradictory objectives. They are dispositioned to be flexible and adaptive by nature and are willing to reduce barriers to collaboration at all levels of the organisation. Consequently incentivising freedom of action that leads to innovation and growth.

The second development is the C-suite is changing from traditionally housing functional roles to a more contemporary, enterprise approach where success is diverse and collectively shared. Anything that disturbs or intrudes on the ability of the C-suite to unite and support the implementation of decisions is seen as a direct threat. Not only to the way in which the TMT operate, but the entire organisation. This new C-suite ensemble unites departmental and functional tenure creating multi-disciplinary teams that operate as a lithe



organisational system. Modern leadership is about leveraging communal ownership, prioritising the opinions of other C-suite members and subordinates, enjoying robust discussions and deliberations and creating a language that everyone understands. For some organisations, this will be a welcomed cultural change (Gronroos, 2006).

Marketing is ready to rise to the challenge, of working across functions and to be a valued partner in organisational success. The discipline brings years of experience of understanding the relationships between multiple functional areas and integrating their respective projects and activities so the entire organisation can succeed. Marketing's deep understanding of the entire organisation and its myriad of stakeholders will no doubt be reflected in the health of the organisation with it taking its rightful position in the C-suite.

### **5.2.3 How do Marketing Directors Influence the Organisation's Overall Performance?**

It is no secret that the crème de la crème of organisation leaders are wired just that little a bit differently when compared with the rest. They possess certain characteristics, whether it be their drive, determination to succeed or their creativity, that have been illuminated, catapulting them to positions in the golden circles of business. Research findings in this study suggest it is the creativity that sits around the marketing discipline that plays the biggest role in organisational performance. Marketing's creativity essentially boils down to its ability to propose innovative and practical ideas and solutions that solve problems and facilitate strategic decision-making (Shin & Zhou, 2007). More often than not executive level decision making involve risks and uncertainties. Decisions made, focus on combating competition and maintaining and extending their competitive edge. While organisations try to foster and strive to improve the creativity levels in the TMT, it is largely dependent on the members sitting around the table. As the saying goes, "you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink". Marketing's creative ability remains unrivalled. It begets wisdom from an assortment of communication processes with stakeholder groups. Assimilating and reflecting on outlooks, to further enhance and improve decision-making. Marketing directors display an unparalleled bravery in not being afraid to challenge and improve on the status quo. All of which subsequently augment an organisations strength in creativity and innovation (Barrick et al., 2013; Bennett, 2009; Wang et al., 2015). Sweeping

shifts in organisational strategy and success begin with subtle changes in the TMT, such as greater inclusion and participation of marketing executives at that level.

Just as Uber was the disruptor to the taxi market, marketing may be the organisations answer to disruption. The welcoming of marketing as the 'Chief Disruptor' in the C-suite, brings the opportunity to turn traditional organisations upside down, helping to reinvent the way they do business. Consequently, unlocking unprecedented levels of growth and income generation. The well-known disruptors such as AIR BNB have deeply absorbed consumer insights, overhauling and completely rewriting industry boundaries to solve consumer annoyances. Interestingly, none has been born out of established organisations. It is intoxicating to think marketing is in a unique position to challenge existing assumptions, behaviours, business models, products, channels, utilising its knowledge in consumers, brands, creativity, technology and data to create never before imagined possibilities within organisations. Marketing epitomises a new breed of growth leader that will contribute to organisational performance and success by completely disrupting and reinventing the customer experience. Marketing led growth is the heart of value creation today (Morgan et al., 2019).

At executive level there needs to be a valuable insight of what is happening in the furrows, so that strategies can be devised to match. Marketing lives and breathes strategy and is naturally positioned to solve not only the very basic problems, that all organisations face, but the more complex ones as well. Aligning marketing strategy to that of the organisation, connecting more efficiently than any other discipline to reach people at their moment of need. Marketing unequivocally improves brand equity and organisational positioning by focusing on customer insights and strengthening stakeholder relationships, to steer organisations through rapidly changing conditions, an imperative antidote in corporate success.

By appointing marketing to the executive ranks, organisations can expect a board member who brings a wealth of diversity. One with experience, skills, and interests in balancing the concerns and priorities of a wider range of stakeholders. One that is committed to serving organisational purpose, inspiring and motivating others to consider stakeholders as more

than a balance sheet. Creating a culture where creativity and innovation thrive, where customers are delighted as their expectations are exceeded. Marketing at the apex of the organisational will considerably question deeply rooted convictions, delicately balancing competing priorities to facilitate effective decision-making. They will propagate and grow seeds in both old and new directions that will prosper over the longer-term. Transformation may take time but the journey will be worthwhile. Marketing in the boardroom is invaluable to organisational performance.

### **5.3 Contributions**

The significance of the current research is two-fold. Theoretically, the study has the potential to expand the current literature on stakeholder management and upper echelons theories within the context of marketing's presence in the executive suite. Empirically, the study will assist business leaders in understanding why marketing representation in the executive maybe the key to enhanced organisational performance. Conversely, the results will have potential to enhance strategy development and organisational structures.

#### **5.3.1 Theoretical Contribution**

The theoretical frameworks of upper echelons and stakeholder management theories are extended in this study in capturing the parameters, which have prevented marketing from taking a seat in the C-suite in the past. While simultaneously, establishing a link between marketing's ability to respond to the interests of stakeholders, through strategic choice, adding a diversity dynamic to the makeup of an organisations TMT's. Thus, allowing marketing its rightful trajectory into future. As originally proposed by Hambrick and Mason in 1984, organisational outcomes can be in part forecasted by the managerial background of the top management team. Findings of this study suggest that managerial background no longer affects strategic choice and performance and once seated at the table, all backgrounds are considered equal. Therefore, it is the group of personality's and the diversity's in perspectives coexisting and deliberating together that delivers an enterprise approach to executive decision making. Thus, providing strong empirical evidence that the key to enhanced organisational success lies in 'disruptors', the voices that have not in the past been heard (Whitler et al., 2018). The meld of upper echelon and stakeholder

management theories reflected in the conceptual framework provides insight into how marketing as an addition to the TMT should be embraced by organisations as an antecedent to success. Not only by marketing becoming the 'TMT disruptor' but by playing an influential role in subsequently shifting an organisations primary focus from shareholders, to that of the stakeholders being at the crux of decision-making. As Whitler et al., (2018) point out, an organisations ability to actively respond to stakeholder demands are not easily replicated by competitors and such a persuasion can lead to an organisations development of long-term advantage. In addition, the conceptual framework identifies key blind spots and presents the incremental steps that need to be addressed.

Corporate governance is multifaceted and as organisations strive to be ambidextrous, creating value while optimising accountability and performance, they should therefore seek to build a dynamic TMT that can deliver across more than one measure of performance (Finkelstein et al., 2009; Whitler et al 2018). Findings of this study suggest organisations need to pursue different kinds of talents and harvest marketing insights to deliver on broader measure of success, to help evolve the compositions of the current executive boardroom. It is clear organisations have an abundance of knowledge and experience in the financial remit. However, it is also clear that consideration needs to be given to the combined impact that each executive individuality contributes. Surpassing the background features of individual TMT members. Advancing upper echelons theory through further consideration of new characteristics in the TMT and consequential impact on organisational success. Such as risk and stakeholder orientation, and alignment with growth, creativity and innovation. Developing these as new potential moderators of predictive scopes of organisational success

From the researchers immersion in the phenomenon of interest, interesting new insights emerged from understanding executives day-to-day realities. Firstly, the confusion over what constitutes marketing and the role it plays in today's organisation leads to a policy gap. Whereby marketing is aware of what it can achieve, however the organisation expectations and perceptions are different. It would appear organisations have been asking the wrong questions of marketing. Therefore, organisations are not ready to provide them

with the necessary resources or to behave without constraint to make a difference in organisational success. Therefore, it sits outside of the TMT, hampered by tactical outputs. Organisations would profit from an improved understanding and acceptance of the strategic notions attached to the discipline of marketing, increasing the chance of releasing value for the organisation (Gronroos, 2006). With the munificent environments organisations operate in, marketing needs the opportunity to operate without constraint so that it can procure a significant reputation for executing greater impact on performance measures. The proposed framework suggests that a cause and effect relationship may exist between creativity in the TMT and strategic dynamism. Organisations have previously underestimated marketing's presence in the C-suite (Morgan et al, 2019). Marketing actively brings skills, explicit personality traits and cognitive processes that maximise creativity, agility, flexibility, market growth, risk taking as well as being the disruptor in challenging the status quo. The framework aims to encourage interest in the patterns organisations should pay attention to in building their executive boardrooms. Marketers are better able to understand how to manipulate or arrange environments so that desired organisational outcomes can be realised over the longer term than their functional counterparts. Such understanding enables the development of strategic actions that take into consideration a wider variety of stakeholders. Therefore, marketing should be provided the latitude of action in the boardroom as the value lies in its ability to diagnose the reactions of various stakeholder groups before an unnecessary deviation may occur. The misalignment or delivery gap occurs when the organisation thinks it knows what its stakeholders desire and yet what is actually delivered does not meet with their expectations. Reflective that there is insufficient diversity in the perspectives of the TMT, adequately mirroring the various stakeholder groups, that are impacted and can influence organisational success. The proposed framework suggests that those organisations inclined to shepherd marketing in their TMT would see heterogeneity prevail. Subsequently strategic choices would emulate a wider range of communities than their homogenous counterparts. Contributing positively to entrepreneurial progenies of innovation, growth and customer centricity.

Marketing is expected to deliver on financial metrics that organisations deem an

appropriate gauge of its value and contribution to overall success. However, there is not enough of a miscellany of metrics for marketing's significance to be illuminated. If organisations were more knowledgeable and comfortable measuring performance that were a more accurate portrayal of an appreciation of and indicators such as innovation, growth, customer centricity and stakeholder consumerism, they would be more inclined to appreciate the long-term benefits the marketing discipline brings and impact on organisational success (Morgan et al., 2019). The proposed framework intends to evolve upper echelons and stakeholder management theory to investigate variables such as innovation, growth and customer centricity on organisational success. Blending empirical data with a conceptual idea. For example, does causality exist between a specific executive profile and particular organisational outcomes. Is the marketing discipline the key in creating and managing organisational assets that deliver the biggest influence over stakeholder value? With a focus on off-balance sheet assets such as customer and other stakeholder relationships.

Conceptualisation plays a central role in knowledge development. The empirical data from this study challenge previously held assumptions that the future of the marketing discipline is becoming obsolete. Findings suggest that marketing provides a different perspective in the TMT, which can rewrite the way others think and foster knowledge. Consequently, altering the normative lens for executing strategic choice. Marketing's unique understanding of stakeholders enables the improvement of measures that have value in detecting whether an organisation is on course and what must be done to correct unorthodox departures from strategy. Examples provided by participants indicate that sub-optimal choices are a direct consequence of limited decision-making. These organisations are profoundly disrupted and disadvantaged by lack of stakeholder knowledge and insight. It is marketing's intrinsic role in facilitating strategic choice through their intimate understanding of stakeholder insights and the market environment that strengthens operational performance. Therefore, there is a need for a revised perspective in organisational thinking in presenting marketing with a seat at the proverbial table.

This study contributes to the literature by reinforcing the importance of upper echelon and stakeholder management theories, in the values, characteristics and perceptions of the

individuals residing in the TMT and their influence on strategic choice. Applying these theories to marketing's ascent up the corporate ladder provides the biggest opportunity to cement itself as part of the furniture now and well into the future.

### **5.3.2 Managerial Contribution and Practical Implications**

This research presents novel and relevant contributions to the literature that has implications for both marketing practitioners and organisations alike. The innovation relates to the indication of changes in the relationships between the desired characteristics of executives in the TMT and strategic choice. Empirically, this study isolates a number of antecedents in relation to the desired personal characteristics and attributes that marketing possess and that are needed in the TMT. To enhance strategy execution along the lines of growth, innovation, customer centricity and stakeholder capitalism. Subsequently leading to superior income generation and competitive advantage. Having appropriate recognition of the contribution marketing makes at the top end of the organisation and a forthright valuing of the role and function is an imperative step in its rightful trajectory. As organisational performance is seen as the result of collective choice, all executives not just marketing should come under the same level of scrutiny. Analysing executives as a collective will more appropriately shed light on corporate strategic posture. Ensuring strategic imperatives cross-organisational boundaries and decision-making is not heavily influenced by one set of capabilities (Joshi & Gimenez, 2014; Sheth & Sisodia, 2005).

Marketing it would seem is the missing piece of the puzzle in cultivating organisational ambidexterity. Marketing's technical expertise, its propensity in building relationships across stakeholder groups combined with its capacity for risk and innovation are desirable leadership mechanisms. Exploiting these marketing capabilities in the TMT provides organisations with great competitive advantage when executing strategic choice. Further extending what is known regarding the relationship between the diversity of executive characteristics and strategic choice

#### **5.4 Research Limitations**

These findings should be considered in light of several potential limitations. Firstly, it should be noted that the nature of research is one in which the student decides on the best approach to conduct the study. Inclusive of collection of data, analysis, interpretation the results and leading the discussion, therefore, the onus is in the researcher to defend the approach taken. This study employed a phenomenological approach into the paucity of marketers in the executive boardroom. Research data was collected by conducting semi structured interviews that examined marketing's impact in the boardroom. The interviews relied on senior executive's ability to articulate their experiences and draw on past events and actions to demonstrate their points. In doing so there is a chance that participants may have embellished recollections and enhanced past actions to be seen in the best light and to be emphatic to the researchers needs, or what they thought the researcher wanted to hear (Boyatzis, 1998; Gill et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2018). It is common in qualitative studies such as this where data is derived and interpreted by the researcher to contain participant and research bias. However, interviewing multiple participants, asking the same questions and triangulating participant's responses with information received from others, who also provided similar details served to mitigate this risk.

A single thesis can only shed a light on a limited amount of facets, bound by the constraints of time and university stipulations among others. Given its qualitative nature and elements of researcher interpretations, it is extremely vexing for other researchers to repeat the study and make generalisations to the larger population. In addition, participants have a lot of control over the content of the data collected. Making it challenging for other researchers to either confirm or deny the results presented. Conversely, verifying the results of this study with scenarios presented in another. Other scholars may also have found a different, potentially more compelling perspective on the subject, or illuminate another point of view to argue based on results. Consequently, this thesis discloses further research avenues as a way to overcome this.



The research sample was small, non-random and focused on organisations with executives based in Western Australia. The sample was not concerned with numerical representativity, rather deepening the understanding of the phenomenon at large. Therefore, it is not representative of all organisations' executive makeups nor does it claim to be. This study in no way consciously champions that the similarities and contrasts identified are evident across other organisations on a global scale. Nonetheless, the positioning of marketers in organisations found in this study contribute to the advancement of the current body of knowledge.

Another limitation of this study, which is typical of studies in this genre, is the inability to investigate causality, due to the lack of statistical results. For example, it is difficult to determine the effect without doubt of particular marketing attributes on corresponding elements of corporates performance. Largely due to varied perspectives which is difficult to gauge. However, as there was a lack of existing qualitative studies utilising phenomenological interpretivism as a means of examining the lived experiences of senior executives. The current approach brings a deeper understanding as to the perceived barriers marketing is facing in gaining a seat in the boardroom.

### **5.5 Future Research Directions**

There are a number of future research avenues that warrant exploration to expand the current body of knowledge. First, it would be advantageous to objectivity validate the findings of this study. The qualitative methodology aims to understand the complex reality of TMT dynamics and give meaning in this context to marketing's position at the table. Conversely, the quantitative methodology intends to obtain accurate and reliable measurements that allow for statistical analysis and generalisations. It would be interesting to see what trends are found collecting data more systematically. In addition to garnering whether similar inferences can be made from a larger sample population, one that is selected at random. Further supplementing and validating the findings of this study. If a different method reaches similar conclusions, the academic community can be more certain findings are in fact a true a reflection of the phenomenon. Thus, findings are not a consequence of the method employed to collect data. Furthermore, by combining

approaches, such as in a mixed method study would be complementary to this inquiry. Another researcher may find discrepancies through quantitative investigation. Subsequently, exhausting qualitative techniques to excavate deeper to discover the cause of occurrence from the premise of individuals involved. There is the potential for expanding this current qualitative inquiry by examining and comparing different types of organisations, originating in different countries in the analysis of phenomena. It is likely that the questions asked to organisations located outside of this study area, may respond differently and even unexpectedly. Opening up new paths and reinforcing the need to continue to explore marketing's role within different, cross-cultural executive contexts.

Finally, future research efforts may consider examining and expanding the proposed conceptual framework and testing the associated assumptions. Previous research has alluded to lack of accountability, budget and culture as being the key barriers to adoption of marketing in the C-suite. Findings suggest that it is the organisations orientation towards stakeholders that influences its strategic choice and propensity to value marketing's contribution as well as the characteristics of the TMT and the amount of heterogeneity that exists within the group. It would be notable to examine the constructs in greater depth and identify particular relationships and the causality between them. Which would no doubt provide another series of future research suggestions to be explored.

## **5.6 Chapter Conclusion**

From examining the lived experiences of executives in this study, the significance of marketing and the role it plays in organisational success was apparent. The findings in this study highlight the need for a new interpretation of marketing and for organisations to reconsider its role in the TMT as an essential ingredient to success. The methodology and data collection was grounded on the literature review. Subsequently the results of the data analysis (Chapter 4) were absorbed through a detailed discussion in unification with the literature review (Chapter 2) and methodology (Chapter 3). The importance of marketing in the TMT was discussed in line with previous literature on stakeholder management and upper echelons theories, in juxtaposition with sentiments from the C-suite community. Study results clarify that the marketing discipline has not become obsolete. Despite references to such in previous literature. Executives elucidated the paucity of marketers in

the TMT. The reason cited for marketing's stagnation included organisational readiness to embrace change, CEO legacy, confusion over the role and purpose of marketing, strategic priorities and organisational propensity for growth and innovation. The opportunity and desire is clearly there from the highest levels for marketing to deliver. Marketing's capabilities in stakeholder management, creativity, innovation and growth provide a tremendous foray into the upper echelons.

A chief finding in this thesis relates to the analogous approaches organisations take in engaging in strategic decision making at the upper levels of corporate management. Given the divergent approaches to structures and those residing in the TMT, there is evidently organisational desire for housing diversity in the TMT. Yet executive transition indicate an unbalanced top team. However, with appetite for marketers ascending to the C-suite organisations can hope to establish a more equalised TMT. A more inclusive TMT affording the opportunity for members to take stock of the current business landscape, and creating an environment where executives are invited to be innovative, nimble and fluid. The leadership behaviours deemed most important for organisational performance and found in TMT was creativity, participative decision-making, effective communication and risk taking. Negating reactive approaches that have previously dominated.

Specifically, it is hoped that the current study presents a clearer view of the challenges marketing has previously faced in gaining access to C-suite, to rclarify the complexities surrounding marketing's climb to the executive. For example, marketing finds it increasingly difficult to demonstrate its contribution to strategy, when so much time and energy is stretched across countless tactical roles. In addition to identifying the important characteristics, which marketing offers in the TMT. Proposing a practical model to act as a framework to assist organisations, in harnessing awareness and establishing the benefit marketing presence in the TMT has on performance and relative success. Therefore, organisational structures are more reflective of heterogeneity. The rich data extracted from this qualitative study point to an upcoming maelstrom of change. Where organisations transform their outlook from historical growth and return on capital to metrics that gauge the longer-term health and are more aligned with value creation. A revolution that marketing can use to its advantage in cementing its rightful position in the C-suite.

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## Appendix A – Participant Recruitment Letter



Day Month 20xx

Mr/Mrs Salutation

Title

Organisation

Address Line 1

Address Line 2

Dear Salutation,

**Re: Research Study on Marketing's Footprint in the Boardroom**

My name is Katheryn Jones and I am a Master of Philosophy student in the School of Marketing, Curtin University.

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study exploring Marketing's footprint in the boardroom. The intention of this study is to explore the views of multiple executives, across different industry settings in investigating marketing's managerial relevance in today's boardroom. Fundamentally, marketing is a strategic discipline, a critical area of expertise in creating sustained stakeholder value. However, it is also a highly scrutinised business function that is constantly being challenged to justify its existence within the organisation, let alone the boardroom.



It is envisaged that findings from this study will bring about new insights on Marketing's relevance and role in the boardroom, helping organisations in their quest to better understand the conditions under which they should promote marketers to the board.

The study involves taking part in a semi-structured interview that will take approximately 60 minutes. The discussion will be based on your experiences in the boardroom (Executive Management) and your views about the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to be successful in this role.

Participation is completely voluntary; you may withdraw from the study at any time. Any information you provide will be kept anonymous, including your name or anything else that could identify you in study reports. Your personal information will not be used for any purposes outside of this research project.

Data will be kept secure by password protection and data encryption and kept for a period of at least 7 years, as required by the university. If you decide to participate there will be no reimbursement or payment for time.

Your participation in the research will be of great importance in extending the understanding of marketing's role in the boardroom and what can be done to meet the need for a global consistency in the way marketing's value is understood and communicated. Curtin University Human Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved this study, (HREC number HRE16906)

If you would like to participate and/or have any further questions and or queries in relation to this study, please do not hesitate to contact me on 043 99 55 258 or via return email

I look forward to following up with you in the coming days.

Yours sincerely,

Katheryn Jones

MPhil Student, Curtin University

## Appendix B Participant Consent



### Consent to Participate in the Research

#### Marketing's footprint in the boardroom: Antecedents and outcomes.

- I..... voluntarily agree and consent to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question.
- I understand the purpose and nature of the study, it has been explained to me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that participation involves taking part in a face to face interview at a time and location convenient. I will be asked a series of questions about my experiences in the boardroom and views about the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to be successful in this role.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded and transcribed.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in dissertations, conference presentations and published papers etc.

☐ I understand that this project has been approved by Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee and will be carried out in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) – updated March 2014.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and acknowledge that I have the following responsibilities:

1. To answer each question to the best of my ability and knowledge
2. To be open and honest
4. To think each answer through before answering

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this research study. I have had all my questions answered.

I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher signature

## Appendix C Participant Information Sheet



**Curtin University**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

**Project Title:** Marketing's footprint in the boardroom: Antecedents and outcomes.

**Project Summary:** You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Katheryn Jones [MPhil Candidate at Curtin University] under the supervision of Professor Piyush Sharma and Dr Russel Kingshott. This study seeks to understand Marketing's role in today's boardroom.

#### **Why me?**

You are invited to participate in the research based on your experience in top management teams. There are no foreseeable risks from this research project. Apart from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or inconveniences with taking part in this study.

#### **What does this research hope to achieve?**

We hope the results of this research will allow us to extend the current research on the role marketing directors play in top management teams, helping businesses to understand ways in which marketing directors can contribute to their long-term profitability and overall organisational success.

#### **How is the study being paid for?**

The project is funded by Curtin University Higher Degree by Research program and supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

Taking part will involve participating in a face-to-face interview at a time and location convenient for you. You will be asked a series of questions about your experiences in the boardroom and your views about the necessary skills, knowledge and experience that underpins a successful board.

The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and be audio-recorded, to aid the research process. This recording will be transcribed into a document format. At no time will anyone, other than the researchers, have access to the recorded interviews and transcripts. The information we collect in this study will be kept under secure conditions at Curtin University for 7 years after the research is published and then it will be destroyed.

You will be provided a summary of the interview transcript and invited to review it to ensure accuracy. You will be able make changes and provide feedback to ensure that it is an accurate reflection of your thoughts and experiences. All identifiable information will be de-identified to protect you and your organisation's privacy.

**Compensation:** Participants will not receive compensation for this study. There may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this research.

**Consent:** Participants are free to withdraw from the interview at any stage and can also decline to answer any question that they choose.

**Confidentiality:** Participants and their organisations will remain anonymous during the study. All names will be changed to protect the privacy and anonymity of participants.

For further information or questions in relation to this study, please contact

**Dr Russel PJ Kingshott**  
**Senior Lecturer | School of Marketing**  
**DBA & Honours Coordinator | Faculty of Business & Law**  
**Curtin University**  
**Tel +61 8 9266 5732**  
**Fax +61 8 9266 3937**  
**Email | [r.kingshott@curtin.edu.au](mailto:r.kingshott@curtin.edu.au)**

Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has approved this study (HREC number HRE 16906). Should you wish to discuss this study with someone not directly involved, in particular, any matters concerning the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, or you wish to make a confidential complaint, you may contact the Ethics Officer on (08) 9266 9223 or the Manager, Research Integrity on (08) 9266 7093 or email [hrec@curtin.edu.au](mailto:hrec@curtin.edu.au)

## Appendix D Interview Discussion Guide



### Marketing's footprint in the boardroom: Antecedents and outcomes.

#### Discussion Guide Semi-Structured Interviews

Purpose	Protocol for Interviews
<p><b>Preliminary Information</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Thank you for participating.</i></li> <li>• <i>The interview will last approximately one hour. Everything we discuss during this interview will be kept in strict confidence and your real name will not appear in any of our results.</i></li> <li>• <i>The interview will be recorded for transcription purposes</i></li> <li>• <i>Ask the participant if they have any questions.</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Record the following information for follow-up purposes:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Interviewee name:</i> _____</li> <li>2. <i>Date of interview:</i> _____</li> <li>3. <i>Interviewee email address:</i> _____</li> <li>4. <i>Interview duration:</i> _____</li> </ol>
<p><b>Background Information</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How would you describe the business your organisation is in? (probe: main objective, key priority areas? how many people does it employ?, layers / organisational structure?)</li> <li>2. How would you describe your role within the organisation? Where does it sit in your organisational structure? (probe: what role does it play?, what type of factors might influence it's role)</li> <li>3. What does your executive team look like? (probe: what functions / disciplines are currently represented? Has this always been the case? If someone resigns is this position automatically recruited or is some thought given to who might be best able to deliver on board direction? what governs this makeup / structure? what differentiates</li> </ol>

	<p>the knowledge /skill mix of those in executive management and those that are not)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. How does your organisation define success?</li> <li>5. How do you think your organisation performs when compared to similar organisations in your industry?</li> <li>6. What are the key capabilities / functions / process that make your organisation successful? (probe: are these found in your current executive team? Is there something missing?)</li> </ol>
<p><b>Executive Experience</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. What role does your executive leadership team play in influencing the strategic direction of your organisation? (probe: oversight responsibilities, regulatory functions?) (do different disciplines have different levels of accountability / expectations?) (looking at specific patterns of influence among cohorts of executive)</li> <li>8. What are the critical issues facing executive management teams? (probe growth strategy and talent management, could marketing may be the central thread missing to sustainable, accountable growth?)</li> <li>9. What is your understanding of the concept diversity in the boardroom? (Provide example of diversity as looking beyond the demographics of age, gender and ethnicity, looking at it from the perspective of a group of individuals with a range of skills, knowledge and experience) (probe: would you say your leadership team is diverse?)</li> <li>10. Is there an ideal skill mix to have in the boardroom? (probe: what qualifications /characteristic /traits are essential?)</li> <li>11. Do you think a diverse board better understands the business environment in which an organisation operates? (probe: do you have examples / evidence of enhanced organisational performance as a direct result of diversity?)</li> <li>12. How would you describe the approach your executive has adopted when it comes to decision making? (probe: stakeholder centric / shareholder centric approach to decision making? (If yes, how, if not why not?) who else is best placed to represent the needs of an organisations myriad of stakeholders at this level?)</li> <li>13. Are executive team decisions aligned with marketing elements? (i.e value proposition, target customer, internal competencies, competitive strategy and how the venture will make money?) Or do you think there is a tendency for decisions to be made that sacrifice</li> </ol>

	<p>intangible assets and long-term competitiveness for short-term profits?</p> <p>14. Is return on investment considered the only measure of business success in your executive? Or is there inclination to look at the intangible assets that provide the source of value and competitive advantage? Or are there other broader measures of organisational effectiveness? For example correlating elements of board diversity with improved organisational performance? (examine alternative measures of performance in the context of stakeholder value)</p> <p>15. What is the synergy between marketing and other disciplines?</p> <p>16. What value does or can marketing bring the executive suite? (Do they bring different insights that weren't there previously?) How can marketing isolate the value it might bring to the boardroom?</p> <p>17. Does the marketing discipline speak the same language as the others in the boardroom? (Explain why / why not)</p> <p>18. What is the role of marketing leadership? (marketing directors' role in the boardroom (do you think the discipline of marketing has become or is becoming obsolete?, why /why not)</p> <p>19. How is, an organisation best structured to maximise performance do you think? (probe: layers of the organisations, departments, positions, executive representation, key personnel/roles/responsibilities/functions)</p>
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Anything else you would like to add?

Would you like to provide any feedback on the interview? I.e. any suggestions for improvement to make it better?

Any other questions?

**\*\*\*Thank respondents for their participation\*\*\***