

KAZIMIERZ KRZAKIEWICZ  
SZYMON CYFERT

**Strategic orientations  
of the organization -  
entrepreneurial, market  
and organizational learning<sup>1</sup>**

**1. Introduction**

To sustain their stable market position in today's intensely competitive and rapidly changing environment, companies strive to secure long-term competitive advantage. The endeavour sends them on a continuous quest for market opportunities, improved customer service, better business models and verifiable management practices. One effect of the processes of change is a greater reliance on management principles that form part of organisational routines and practices. The principles of strategic management which influence and direct the activities of an organisation and are intended to ensure its viability and superior performance are called strategic orientations (Hakala, 2011).

The field of strategic management has come up with a number of different approaches to describing strategic orientations, including entrepreneurial orientation, which drives a firm to explore new market opportunities, market orientation (customer value orientation), which enhances value for consumers, and learning orientation,

Professor Kazimierz Krzakiewicz,  
Poznań University  
of Economics and Business,  
Poland,

ORCID: [orcid.org/0000-0002-4770-2478](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4770-2478).

Prof. Szymon Cyfert,  
Poznań University  
of Economics and Business,  
Poland,

ORCID: 0000-0002-5563-1403.

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whose focus is on developing, acquiring and sharing knowledge within an organisation. Studies into strategic orientations that set out to explain different levels of organisational performance prove that each type of strategic orientation can have a positive impact on business performance (Balodi, 2014).

Current research on strategic orientations places greater value on the importance of integrated analysis of the different types of strategic orientations. The underlying assumption of such research is that firms follow several orientations which, combined, facilitate assessment of organisational strategy from various points of view (Lonial, Carter, 2015). At the same time, one should point out that whilst the literature on the subject reveals a number of theoretical models explicating the interplay of strategic orientations, no common approach has been developed as yet to integrating various strategic orientations.

The purpose of this study is to discuss the key aspects of the three strategic orientations - entrepreneurial, market and organizational learning, outlining the relationship between them and the consequences of their choice on the development of the organization.

## **2. Types of strategic orientation of organisations**

Organisational strategy can be thought of as a specific mode of action (Mintzberg, 1978). It determines the organisation's internal processes and helps it adapt to environmental conditions. Defined in this way, a strategy is a set of specific "pathways" whereby an organisation can achieve its basic goals by shaping and directing its activities (Fulford, Rizzo, 2009). Assuming that the principles of strategic management of a firm can form such pathways, it will be in order to assume that an organisation following a set of certain defined pathways follows a specific strategic orientation. In other words, a strategic orientation could be described as a set of strategic management principles that generate the behaviours of an organisation intended to enhance its performance (Hakala, 2011).

The sources of strategic orientations are linked to the search for key strategy components and attempts at strategy operationalisation. The existing approaches to identifying strategy dimensions, whether based on verbal description (narrative approach) or typologies (classification approach), are limiting when it comes to comparing strategies used by different organisations. As a concept, a strategic orientation is an attempt to operationalise strategy, one that allows various strategies to be compared using certain characteristics that are common to all organisations and reflect strategy content (comparative method).

Subsequent research began to interpret the concept of strategic orientation in broader terms, treating it as a general term for describing different types of strategic behaviours of an organisation. The literature on the subject describes multiple types of strategic orientation, such as internal and external orientation, orientation towards exploring business opportunities, orientation towards avoiding hard problems, technological orientation, or orientation for the future (Grinstein, 2008; Cadogan, 2012; Ruvio et al., 2014). The three most commonly cited strategic orientations are: entrepreneurial orientation, market orientation and learning orientation. These strategic orientations direct various company behaviours, each of them addressing in its own way the issue of how to compete in any given market segment.

Entrepreneurial orientation places greater value on the importance of actively searching for new market opportunities. The classic approach is to analyse entrepreneurial orientation in terms of three components: innovativeness (willingness to experiment and create new ideas), proactiveness (looking for new market opportunities), and risk acceptance (organisation's willingness to engage in risky ventures). In a broader approach to entrepreneurial orientation, other components are included as well, such as autonomy (organisation's independence in developing new ideas and opportunities) and competitiveness (propensity to achieve and sustain a strong position in the marketplace through aggressive competition). Generally, two approaches can be identified when it comes to defining entrepreneurial orientation: a one-dimensional approach, in which a firm can only be defined as entrepreneurial when all elements of entrepreneurial posture are highly developed (Covin, Sklevin 2009), and a multi-dimensional approach, which assumes that an organisation can be treated as entrepreneurial even if not all components of its entrepreneurial posture are highly developed (Lumpkin, Dess 2006).

Market orientation is focused on delivering superior value to customers and addressing market expectations properly (Narver, Slater 1999).

Learning orientation is focused on developing and leveraging knowledge within an organisation. The traditional approach to conceptualising learning orientation places the analytical focus on three components: commitment to learning, shared vision of organisational development, and open-mindedness. In a broader approach, intra-organisational knowledge-sharing is added as another component; it assumes that there is an effective knowledge transfer system in place that allows an organisation to analyse current decision-making processes and implement new ways or organisational activities (Calantone, Cavusgil, Zhao, 2012).

When reviewing their characteristics, one can see that different strategic orientations emphasise different principles of strategic management. While entrepreneurial organisations set out actively to explore and leverage new market opportunities, market-oriented organisations are focused on comprehensive market analysis and ensuring superior value for customers; learning-oriented organisations, in turn, keep their focus on developing and using knowledge to attain their organisational goals. In this way different orientations, or principles of strategic management, shape different organisational behaviours, which in turn are a source for building competitive advantages and have a role in explicating why some firms perform better than others.

**Table 1 Types of strategic orientations of organisations**

	Characteristics	Components and approaches
Entrepreneurial orientation	By focusing on product-market innovations, an entrepreneurial organisation engages in highly risky ventures and achieves competitive advantage with 'proactive' innovations (Miller, 1993, p. 771). Entrepreneurial orientation is a strategic-making process that provides organisations with a basis for innovative actions and strategic choices (Rauch et al. 2009, p. 762)	Components: innovativeness, proactiveness, risk-taking (Covin, Slevin 2009) Additional components: autonomy, competitive aggressiveness (Lumpkin, Dess 2006) Approaches: one-dimensional and multi-dimensional to measurement/analysis (Covin, Slevin 2009)
Market orientation	Market orientation is the ability to generate information about customers' current and future needs, allocate this information to relevant units and respond to it properly (Kohli, Jaworski, 1999, p. 6) Market orientation is an organizational culture that most effectively and efficiently creates the necessary behaviours for the creation of superior value for buyers and thus continued superior performance for the business (Narver, Slater 1999, s. 21)	Components: generation and dissemination of market information, and the response to that information (Kohli, Jaworski 1999) Approaches: customer orientation, competitor orientation, inter-functional coordination (Narver, Slater 1999)
Learning orientation	Learning orientation includes all values of an organisation which determine its ability to develop and use knowledge (Sinkula et al. 2007, p. 309) Learning orientation reflects the propensity of an organisation to verify continuously basic assumption about its business organisation and environment (Hakala, 2013, p. 104)	Components: commitment to learn, shared organisational vision, open-mindedness (Sinkula et al. 2007) Additional component: intra-organizational knowledge-sharing (Calantone et al. 2012)

**Source:** author's compilation based on: Kohli, Jaworski, 1999; Narver, Slater 1999; Lumpkin, Dess 2006; Sinkula et al. 2007; Covin, Slevin 2009; Rauch et al. 2009; Calantone et al. 2012; Hakala, 2013

Each of those strategic orientations affects organisational performance differently and an assessment of their impact is only possible through a separate analysis of each orientation.

Empirical research has revealed that individual strategic orientations are geared towards different organisational goals and performance and that organisations use them in specific environmental circumstances.

### **3. Strategic orientations and organisational performance**

Studies on strategic orientations have found that, considered separately, individual orientations are positively correlated with organisational performance (Kirca, 2015, Keith, Stephen 2018, Rauch et al. 2009) and influence business effectiveness (Abebe, Angriawan, 2014, Kaya, Portman 2011). Objectives such as increased profits or revenues or higher returns on investments can be achieved through entrepreneurial or market orientations (Tajeddini, 2010). Market orientation or learning orientation contribute to improved innovativeness of a firm, which is typical of intensively competitive environments (Kaya, Patton, 2011) and positively correlated with business performance (Kropp, Lindsay, Shoham, 2006). Market or entrepreneurial orientations are positively correlated with searching for new and leveraging existing organisational capabilities (Abebe, Angriawan, 2014). Having said that, research has found that despite similarities in how individual strategic orientations affect organisational performance, each orientation is geared towards different results, making a choice of any one of them dependent on the defined strategic objectives (Zortea – Johnston, Darroch, Mator, 2012). Similar conclusions can be drawn from studies on how strategic orientations are related to innovativeness and new product development, which show that different types of orientation are conducive to different innovation strategies (Zortea – Johnston, Darroch, Mator, 2012). Whilst market orientation fosters technology-based innovations and generates value for existing customers, it is not conducive to innovation in new, developing market segments. Entrepreneurial orientation fosters technology-based innovations, but it fails to stimulate market-based innovations (Zhou, Yim, Tse, 2005).

Studies have found that while entrepreneurial organisations create two types of innovations – that is those that are sought-after in the market and those that develop it – market-oriented organisations are almost exclusively concerned with the first type (Zortea – Johnston, Darroch, Mator, 2012). Innovativeness is often a factor affecting strategic orientation and organisational performance, and its role is particularly enhanced in organisational learning orientation, and

less so in market orientation (Baker, Siukula, 2009). Finally, research by Slater and Narver (2010) has established a stronger link between market orientation and organisational performance than is the case for learning or entrepreneurial orientations.

#### **4. Environment and its impact on strategic orientation**

In addition to organisational objectives, the choice of strategic orientation is also dependent on situational factors. Research in this area has found that individual strategic orientations facilitate different results in the specific external and internal conditions (Barrett, Balloun, Weinstein 2005).

Studies on the role of environment in shaping the interrelationships between strategic orientations and organisational performance have looked at a number of factors, such as levels of environmental volatility, nature of organisational culture, globalisation, or national economic development. Accordingly, market orientation and organisational learning orientation are shaped by a collectivistic cultural environment and its corresponding organisational culture (Yilmaz, Alpkan, Ergun, 2005). As regards national economic development, studies of firms in Finland and Hungary have shown that entrepreneurial orientation and market orientation are correlated positively with organisational growth, whereas a positive relationship between a learning orientation with business performance was only revealed for developing markets (Laukkanen et al. 2013).

In terms of internal organisational factors, the relationship between a strategic orientation and organisational performance was found to be affected by the size of an organisation, duration of its lifetime and its operating sector (Real, Roldan, Leal, 2014). The development of a strategic orientation has been found to be more beneficial to commercial organisations than to public ones (Barrett, Balloun, Weinstein, 2005). As regards the size of an organisation, an entrepreneurial orientation may be of greater benefit to large organisations, whereas a learning organisation is more desirable for small and medium-sized organisations (Real, Roldan, Leal, 2014).

As used in organisations, strategic orientations may also have a combined, cumulative effect on business performance. This is because organisations can pursue a number of strategic orientations concurrently and their integrated effects potentially may help them achieve competitive advantages (Schindehutte, Morris, Kocak, 2008).

Studies on strategic orientations indicate that some types of orientations may be conducive to the development of others. The question that arises as a corollary to

these findings is one about the interplay between the different types of strategic orientations, including the direction of such interplay, and whether one type of strategic orientation can give rise to another.

A majority of the studies on entrepreneurial, market and learning orientations lead one to a conclusion that learning orientation is one that acts as an 'integrator' for the other types of strategic orientations and business performance (Hakala, 2011). Organisational learning orientation may intermediate in relationships among market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation and business performance. The development of entrepreneurial or market orientations is also conducive to the development of learning orientation, which, in turn, is positively linked to innovativeness (Keskin, 2006), successful commercialisation of new products and business effectiveness (Hakala, 2013). This means that organisations that rely on entrepreneurial or market orientations should also develop organisational learning processes in order to achieve satisfactory business performance (Wang 2008). In addition to learning orientation, some researchers also assign the integrative role to entrepreneurial orientation, which enhances the effect the market and learning orientations have on an organisation achieving competitive advantage (Rodríguez, Fuentes, 2014). Other studies give the role of mediator to market orientation; these studies point out that entrepreneurial organisations are more market-oriented and that expected business performance might not be achieved if entrepreneurial behaviours are not supported by market-based orientations (Matsumo, Metzger, Ozsomer, 2002).

## **5. Complementarity of strategic orientations**

Research into the theory of strategic management includes studies on the complementarity of strategic orientations. The underlying assumption in those studies is that a positive effect of strategic orientations is enhanced when a number of them are pursued simultaneously. This means that better results can be achieved when strategic orientations are integrated or used in a configuration than would be than only one line of strategic behaviours is followed. The questions asked in this type of research are: How does the pursuit of several strategic orientations at the same time relate business performance? What are the types of organisations that rely on configurations of strategic orientations? What are the configurations that translate into better performance and under what conditions?

A majority of the studies into those issues are concerned with an analysis of the complementarity of entrepreneurial and market orientations, and their

particular focus is on a positive effect of an orientation on customers in the intensely innovative environment, risk-taking, and exploration of market opportunities (Brockman, Jones, Becherer, 2012).

Some scholars researching the integrated effect of strategic orientations on organisational performance look at orientations as higher-order constructs which determine an organisation's competitive culture, proactive learning culture or competitive advantage. In other words, they examine them as variables with positive connections to business performance (Lonial, Carter, 2015). Other scholars argue that there is no need for organisations to have several well-developed strategic orientations to achieve performance. Reference can be made in this context to market orientation which may be positively linked to business performance only via two components of entrepreneurial orientation, namely innovativeness and proactiveness (Grinstein, 2008). Another view in the literature is that the best way for an organisation to achieve its expected performance is to combine a high level of market orientation with a medium level of entrepreneurship (Bhuian, Menguc, Bele, 2005).

Some scholars also offer typologies of firms based on different configurations of their strategic orientations (Baladi, 2014). What is particularly stressed here is that entrepreneurial and market orientations exert their strongest interconnected effect on a firm's performance in high-technology sectors in highly dynamic and competitive environments (Boso, Cadogan, Story, 2013).

## 6. Conclusion

An important factor for any organisation that wants to ensure its competitiveness is that it must be able to formulate models of strategic behaviours. These behaviours should be informed by the organisation's operating domains and its internal operating structure and resources. Importantly, an organisation can diversify the scope of its operations by pursuing a few strategic orientations. This, in turn, might be conducive to the organisation achieving sustained competitive advantage.

That said, the findings of research into relationships between strategic orientations and organisational performance are not unambiguous. Learning, entrepreneurial and market orientations are all mediators of strategic orientations and performance. Different strategic orientations refer to different principles of strategic management, which makes it difficult to build models explicating the relationships involved.

In addressing entrepreneurial, market and learning orientations, this study has described some of the relationships between different orientations and their effect on organisational performance. This has allowed us to identify areas of future studies on strategic orientations – that is to say, their integration, the effect of their configurations on organisational performance in different environments, and internal factors underlying strategic orientations.

## Summary

### **Strategic orientations in organisations**

The underlying assumption of this study is that it is possible to define some principles of strategic management. These principles, called strategic orientations, influence and direct the activities of an organisation and are intended to ensure its viability and superior performance. So far, studies into strategic orientations that set out to explain different levels of organisational performance prove that each type of strategic orientation can have a positive impact on business performance.

The purpose of this study is to discuss the key aspects of the three strategic orientations - entrepreneurial, market and organizational learning, outlining the relationship between them and the consequences of their choice on the development of the organization. In addressing entrepreneurial, market and learning orientations, the study has described some of the relationships between orientations and their effect on organisational performance. This has allowed us to identify areas of future studies on strategic orientations – that is to say, their integration, the effect of their configurations on organisational performance in different environments, and internal factors underlying strategic orientations.

**Keywords:** *strategic orientations, entrepreneurial orientation, market orientations, organisational learning orientation.*

## Streszczenie

### **Strategiczna orientacja organizacji**

U podstaw opracowania leży założenie o możliwości zdefiniowania zasad strategicznego zarządzania, wpływających na zachowania organizacji i skoncentrowanych na realizację celów oraz na

zapewnienie wysokiego poziomu sprawności funkcjonowania określanych mianem strategicznych orientacji. Dotychczasowe badania nad strategicznymi orientacjami, pozwalające na wyjaśnianie odmiennych poziomów rezultatów osiągniętych przez organizacje, udowadniają, że każdy z rodzajów strategicznych orientacji może wywierać korzystny wpływ na osiągnięte przez organizacje rezultaty działalności biznesowej.

Celem opracowania jest przeprowadzenie dyskusji nad kluczowymi aspektami trzech orientacji strategicznych, tj.: przedsiębiorczej, rynkowej i organizacyjnego uczenia się, zarysowanie relacji pomiędzy nimi i konsekwencji ich wyboru na rozwój organizacji. W opracowaniu odnosząc się do orientacji przedsiębiorczej, orientacji rynkowej orientacji i orientacji na organizacyjne uczenie się wskazano na relacje między poszczególnymi orientacjami i ich wpływ na rezultaty organizacji. Pozwoliło to na identyfikację obszarów, w których powinny być realizowane przyszłe badań nad strategicznymi orientacjami – integrację orientacji, wpływ konfiguracji strategicznych orientacji na efektywność organizacji w różnych warunkach otoczenia, wewnętrzne uwarunkowania strategicznych orientacji.

#### **Słowa**

**kluczowe:** *strategiczne orientacje, orientacji przedsiębiorczej, orientacji rynkowej orientacji i orientacji na organizacyjne uczenie się.*

#### **JEL**

**Classification:** L21, L22, L25

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