

Improving Marketing Knowledge among Israeli SMEs using Metaphor- and Storyline-Based Intervention

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Abstract

The purpose of this mixed-methods research was to determine the effectiveness of an intervention for improving marketing knowledge among managers and employees of Israeli small and medium-sized business. This research paper reports the quantitative data. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) contribute to economic growth and job creation, but have a high rate of failure compared with larger organizations. Marketing knowledge is a key component of SME success, but, to our knowledge, no marketing knowledge interventions have been validated for use in SME environments. The newly developed intervention programme by the researcher was designed to enhance Israeli SMEs' marketing knowledge and marketing strategy, imparting new marketing skills and allowing SMEs to operate with better marketing knowledge. This study tested the efficacy of an intervention designed to improve five dimensions of marketing knowledge among SMEs using metaphors and storyline approach through consultant-led training sessions. Results indicated a significant improvement ($p < .1$) in marketing need awareness, marketing attitudes, awareness of marketing processes, and marketing process beliefs, compared with pre-intervention scores. The intervention did not result in a significant change in organizational marketing skills.

Key words: Marketing knowledge, Marketing intervention, business failure, organizational learning, SME, SME marketing

Introduction

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have a high rate of failure compared with larger organizations (Buchanan and Evesson, 2004; Delmar and Shane, 2003, Honig and Karlsson, 2004; McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). High SME failure rates are a problem for the entire economy. SMEs contribute to economic growth and job creation (Gilmore et al., 2001; Jones and Rowley, 2011; O'Dwyer et al., 2009), thus playing an important role in the stability of national economies (Marom and Lussier, 2014).

Globally, it is estimated that about half of SMEs fail, with 75% failing during the first five years (Buchanan & Evesson, 2004). Other estimates are even higher. Boyle and Desai (1991) claimed that 67% of new businesses fail during the first four years, and half of start-ups fail during the first 18 months. Other statistical data show that the survival rate of SMEs is country dependent; the survival rates of SMEs in Australia, Sweden, and the UK are over 80%; in Italy, Luxemburg, Finland, and Spain, approximately 70%; and in the United States, less than 50% (Honig & Karlsson, 2004; Shane & Delmar, 2004). The literature strongly suggests that intrinsic factors such as lack of marketing knowledge are the major causes of failure, affecting failure much more than extrinsic factors such as economy or business competition (Friedman, 2005; SBA, 2014).

In Israel, a survey conducted in 2013 found that 12% of businesses fail in their first year of operation (a larger survival rate compared with 2006 data), and 58% of businesses fail in their first seven years of operation (CBS, 2013). The failure risk assumption for all businesses in the country is 5.88 on a 1-10 scale. In comparison, the risk assumption for SMEs in their first year of existence is 6.8; this decreases to 6.5 in the third year and 6.35 in the fifth year. The reality in Israel is that businesses with a turnover of less than \$2 million have a 50% likelihood of failing, which is higher than those with a larger turnover (BDI-coface, 2006). All this suggests that Israeli SME businesses are inherently vulnerable.

Professional advice, including third-party consulting and intervention, is one of the strongest predictors of SME survival (Lussier and Corman, 1995; Marom and Lussier, 2014).

(Lussier and Corman, 1995; Maron and Lussier, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial from an economic standpoint to identify the causes of SME failure and to develop interventions that can help decrease the number of SME failures. Tock and Baharub (2010) stressed the need for an intervention that effectively educates SME businesses to use marketing concepts, methods, and strategies that will enable them to compete in their field.

Mills (2009) found that using metaphors to teach students marketing was effective in improving marketing knowledge and helped overcome resistance to learning. Following Mills' finding, the aim of this study was to test the efficacy of a short-term, facilitator-led intervention using metaphors and storyline approach to improve marketing knowledge among SME owners and their employees. The intervention targeted five dimensions of marketing knowledge: marketing need awareness, marketing attitudes, awareness of marketing processes, marketing process beliefs, and organizational marketing skills. The purpose of the research was to answer the question: Does a metaphor- and storyline-based intervention program enhance Israeli SME businesses' marketing knowledge?

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. First, we provide background information on SMEs in Israel and on SME business marketing, focusing on defining the five variables of this study. Next, we describe the intervention. The setting, sample, research instrument, and data collection and analysis procedures are described in the Methods section. The results are presented, followed by a discussion and conclusion.

Background and Literature Review

Although small, Israel has an advanced market economy (Israel Ministry of Finance, 2012; Marom and Lussier, 2014) with a reputation for successful SMEs and startups (Israel Ministry of Finance, 2012). There are approximately 500,000 SMEs in Israel, accounting for over 99% of all businesses. In the private sector, these SMEs employ 55% of the nation's workforce, contribute 45% of gross national product, and provide 15% of exports (Israel Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor, 2010). According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS; 2013), SMEs founded in 2012 created 84,400 new job openings in Israel (CBS, 2013). For comparison, in the United States, the largest economy in the world, 99.7% of businesses are SMEs; they employ 49.2% of the workforce in the private sector, provide 64% of new private-sector jobs, and contribute 33% of export value (Small Business Administration, 2012). These data establish the fact that SMEs make a significant contribution to the Israeli economy. Decreasing the rate of SME failure in Israel could lead to further economic gains.

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likelihood of failing, which is higher than those with a larger turnover (BDI-Coface, 2006).

SME researchers disagree about the root causes of SME failure. One of the best studied models, the Lussier 15 model, proposes 15 variables that contribute to SME success, including planning, professional advisors, and marketing. Empirical research has provided support for this model among small businesses in Israel (Maron and Lussier, 2014), with planning and professional advice proving to be particularly strongly associated with success in that country. Although there have been conflicting results across settings and samples using this model, professional advice has routinely been an important success factor (Lussier and Corman, 1995). This suggests a need to standardize and structure business consultation interventions using the latest marketing knowledge and adjustments according to businesses' unique characteristics.

Marketing is a key area of interest for professional advice to SME owners. In Israel, 24% of surviving SMEs managers have attributed their successes to strategic marketing abilities (Friedman, 2005). The importance of marketing has been confirmed in international research literature, as well (Bates, 1990; Moutray, 2007; Shane and Delmar, 2004). Strategic marketing is a critical resource for SME survival, because it helps managers to compete with larger businesses (Van Scheers, 2011).

Lack of marketing knowledge contributes to business problems and aggravates the state of SME businesses already in crisis (Jovanov and Stojanovski, 2012; Moutray, 2007). In Israel, there exist government programs to support SME survival, but they deal mostly with the financial aspects of SMEs (e.g., tax benefits, loans, and direct financial support), rather than offering solutions for managerial problems such as lack of marketing knowledge (Bennett, 2008). This is increasingly troubling, as a growing body of research indicates that small firms find it difficult to conduct market research, measure the efficacy of promotions, and price items (Brouthers et al., 2015; Denis et al., 2015; Jovanov and Conevska, 2011). Therefore, there is a need for an intervention to improve marketing knowledge among SME owners and employees.

Dimensions of marketing knowledge

Marketing knowledge is a complicated construct that may have multiple dimensions. Additionally, marketing knowledge is related to concepts of marketing knowledge utilization (Menon and Varadarajan, 1992) and marketing knowledge management (Tsai and Shih, 2004), both of which may be integral to SME success. Because marketing knowledge is a prerequisite to the utilization and management of marketing knowledge, this study focuses on marketing knowledge itself. In the following paragraphs, we identify five dimensions of marketing knowledge based on a review of SME marketing literature.

In many cases, SME owners may not be aware of the need for marketing in generating market share and cash flow (Ropega, 2011). If SME owners exhibit a lack of marketing need awareness, they may be unlikely to contribute time and financial

resources to marketing activities, potentially contributing to business failure. Therefore, marketing need awareness is one dimension of marketing knowledge, which could contribute to SME success.

Even if SME owners are aware of the need for marketing, they may hold mistaken marketing attitudes, owing to an inability to distinguish marketing and sales as separate business functions. In effect, many SMEs focus on sales and are not involved in marketing, but they may not be aware of this distinction (McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003). Marketing, unlike sales, has a long-term orientation and focuses on the development of intangible assets such as brand awareness. SME owner-managers may not engage consciously with intangible assets of their firms, finding tangible sales efforts easier and more accessible. However, sales efforts that focus on short-term gains may not be successful without a strategic marketing scheme, so mistaken marketing attitudes could contribute to SME failure.

The third dimension of marketing knowledge is awareness of marketing processes. SME owners who are aware of the need for marketing strategy as distinct from sales efforts may still lack a clear vision for organizational marketing goals. Relatedly, employees may not understand the organization's marketing strategy, making it difficult for employees to implement that strategy. This can be understood as a lack of awareness of marketing processes, which could lead to unsuccessful implementation of marketing strategy and, ultimately, SME failure.

Even when SME owners are aware of the need for marketing, can distinguish between marketing and sales, and have a clear strategic marketing vision that all employees understand, the organization's marketing efforts may be ineffective if the marketing strategy is based on incorrect marketing process beliefs (Jovanov and Stojanovski, 2012). For example, the marketing strategy may be based on the incorrect belief that marketing is only necessary when the business has an active need to attract new customers, or that customers' response to the business is essentially determined by the product, rather than by the way the product is marketed.

Finally, even the most robust and well-formed marketing strategy cannot have a positive effect on business unless the business has the organizational marketing skills to ensure that it is implemented. Organizational marketing skills are demonstrated by a commitment to allocating resources, such as funds, personnel, and knowledge, to strategic marketing activities (Jones and Rowley, 2011). Marketing knowledge utilization and management are closely related to organizational marketing skills (Menon and Varadarajan, 1992; Tsai and Shih, 2004). In SMEs, organizational roles and hierarchies may not be clearly defined (Cheng et al., 2016), leading to a failure to implement a marketing strategy caused by an unclear role definition and lack of organizational ability. Therefore, organizational marketing skill is a fifth dimension of marketing knowledge.

Organizational learning

Organizational learning makes it possible for SMEs to improve marketing knowledge on the individual and organizational levels. Organizational learning can be defined as a change in the state of the organization, stemming from new knowledge and meanings that are shared among an organization's members and may be explicit or implicit (Law and Chuah, 2015). Research has demonstrated a connection between organizational learning and organizational survival (Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2010). Organizational learning involves integration of new learning in the daily conduct of the organization, with the aim of improving employee performance, outcomes, self-efficacy, and openness to change (Bates and Khasawneh, 2005).

In the business environment, there may be significant obstacles to organizational learning, which should be taken into account in designing interventions and training programs. Legge et al. (2007) explored managers' study method preferences and found that managers tend to expect quick, practical training; techniques that involve lengthy lectures or sentimentality could alienate them from the learning process. The researchers also found that managers are frequently rigid and not open to new learning. The authors emphasized the importance of meeting expectations in training this type of audience to succeed in marketing education programs (Legge et al., 2007).

According to Kuster and Vila (2006), the three most widespread learning programs in the business and marketing world are practical exercises, analysis of cases, and lectures. They found that the latter two ways of teaching are ineffective, because they lack connection to the real business world. The authors emphasized the great advantage of using practical exercises because they are relevant to the reality of business practice. Jones et al. (2014) researched SME owners who participated in a leadership development program over a two-year period, drawing on data from 19 focus groups involving 51 participants in Wales. The LEAD Wales program and factors affecting it showed that entrepreneurs must engage in action in order to learn, and then they may transfer what they have learned to the organization. These findings informed the development of the intervention tested in this present study.

Intervention using metaphors and storyline

Based on the review of literature, the researcher developed an intervention tool aimed at improving marketing knowledge along the five dimensions identified above. The intervention utilizes the principles of organizational learning to provide the organization with adaptive tools that will allow it to better interact with and exploit opportunities in the business environment, thus enhancing survival probability. The intervention takes the everyday experience of the participants as a resource for discussion of marketing issues; then, the intervention changes the active knowledge of the participants by introducing new knowledge about the experiences discussed, resulting in change in their level of knowledge (see Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2010). In addition, participants are encouraged to try out their new knowledge when confronted with actual encounters with clients in their daily business activities,

rand these experiences are later discussed in the group to foster more active content learning.

The intervention is a continuous professional development (CPD; see Fraser et al., 2007) tool delivered by a trained consultant who meets with employees at the SME for a series of four workshop sessions, each lasting two to three hours. In these sessions, participants engage in game-like experiences designed to teach marketing concepts and tools for everyday use in the office. In each workshop, the consultant guides participants through narratives that use metaphors of mediaeval times to bring marketing ideas to learners in a simplified and colorful manner, thus encouraging learners to engage and actively participate in the learning. The metaphor approach to marketing knowledge development has been validated by Mills (2009) and has been shown to be effective in reducing resistance to learning (Furst and Cable, 2008).

Following the recommendation of Legge et al. (2007), the intervention was designed to be as short as possible, in order to avoid losing participants' patience. The goal of the intervention is to alter SMEs' organizational culture (see Prajogo and McDermott, 2011) through organizational learning that enables participants to acquire experience and knowledge relevant to marketing (see Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2010). The intervention has been piloted in business settings by the researcher for the benefit of his clients, but has not yet been subjected to rigorous empirical testing to demonstrate its effectiveness and to evaluate its outcomes. Therefore, the goal of this study was to evaluate the intervention as a structured tool for improving marketing knowledge among SMEs in Israel. Because the intervention was designed to improve marketing knowledge as measured by five variables, we hypothesized that participants' scores in each of these five variables would increase following intervention. Specifically, we tested the following hypotheses:

H1: Participants' post-intervention marketing need awareness scores are significantly higher than their pre-intervention mar-

keting need awareness scores.

H2: Participants' post-intervention marketing attitudes scores are significantly higher than their pre-intervention marketing attitudes scores.

H3: Participants' post-intervention awareness of marketing process scores are significantly higher than their pre-intervention awareness of marketing process skills scores.

H4: Participants post-intervention marketing process beliefs scores are significantly higher than their pre-intervention marketing process beliefs scores.

H5: Participants post-intervention organizational marketing skills scores are significantly higher than their pre-intervention organizational marketing skills scores.

Methods

Setting and sample

The setting for this study consisted of SMEs in Israel. We recruited businesses using a Google Ad-Words advertisement. Inclusion criteria were as follows: (a) the SME was active in Israel, (b) a minimum of four employees worked directly for the SME, (c) the SME had a minimum monthly turnover of 30,000 ILS, including tax, (d) the SME was a for-profit organization, and (e) the SME had been in operation for less than 10 years. Ten SMEs approached the researcher in a period of one month. Three did not qualify; two stated that they were too busy. Five qualified and were interested in participating in the study.

Not all employees from all organizations were included. Some were excluded, as follows. At ABC Printing, five employees were excluded because they did not have tenure and did machinery-related work only. At Telepele, one of the two investors was not involved in the daily operations of the business and was thus excluded. The same was true of two investors at Future Chair. Interneto had one technical employee who just supported the data with no involvement in the daily operations and worked from home; this employee was thus excluded.

Table 1: Characteristics of research participants

Field	No. of Employees	No. of participants	Pseudonym	SME Age	Notes
Print	10	5	ABC printing	4	Highly competitive market
Communication	7	6	Telepele	2	Expensive service for business
Food services	5	4	Food for Thought	2	Home based operation
Internet	4	3	Interneto	2	Highly competitive market
Hi-tech	6	4	Future Chair	1	Product development, dependent on investors

This yielded a final sample size of 22 participants. Collins et al. (2007) recommended a minimum sample size of 21 for most experimental designs and one-tailed hypotheses. Therefore, the final sample was adequate to address the research questions.

Research instrument

To collect data, we administered a closed-ended questionnaire to measure five dimensions of marketing knowledge: marketing need awareness, marketing attitudes, awareness of marketing processes, marketing process beliefs, and organizational marketing skills. The questionnaire consisted of 18 items measuring the five variables of interest. All items were scored on a five-point Likert scale. Because there were no existing quantitative research instruments capable of measuring all variables of interest, we developed the research instrument, drawing on concepts from existing literature.

We overcame the disadvantages of using a new research instrument by conducting a focus group to ensure face validity. The focus group consisted of academic and business colleagues acquainted with SMEs and marketing concepts. The purpose of this focus group was to determine whether the questionnaire items, in experts' opinion, adequately captured the variables of interest. Based on experts' commentary, we made minor changes to the wording of the research instrument. However, results of the focus group suggested that the questionnaire items were adequate to measure the five variables.

Data collection

Data collection began in 2009. The pre-intervention questionnaires were administered in person just before the start of the first session of the intervention. The format of the intervention sessions was predetermined by the structure of the intervention. Sessions took place once a week for up to 90 minutes. The number of sessions was also predefined, 4 sessions. Sessions included both owners and staff at the SME's business place; setting and schedule were flexible, based on participants' preferences. During the session, the owner and staff were asked to stop working and detach themselves from any interference, such as the telephone, clients, or other business issues.

Three months after the end of the 4 sessions, post-intervention questionnaires (consisting of the same research instrument) were administered, either face-to-face or via e-mail. This period gave time for the SMEs to assimilate the intervention's teachings, and contributed to the long-term validity of the findings. The communication with the SME at this point was informal, via face-to-face or digital means.

Data analysis

Before analyzing data, I tested for validity and performed factor analysis to determine whether the data conformed to the theoretical model and foundation of the questionnaire. I also tested for normality to check whether the answers were distributed normally, which enabled the use of parametric statistics in processing this data (Beyth-Marom, 1986). The proce-

dures and results for these validity assessments are presented in the following paragraphs.

Factor analysis. I conducted factor analysis using participants' pre-intervention responses to the closed-ended questionnaire to negate the possibility of prior familiarity with the questionnaire affecting the response patterns. I conducted exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using the principal components method, Varimax rotation, and 25 iterations. First, the number of factors was unconstrained by limited Eigenvalues greater than 1. This resulted in a factor structure that was not consistent with the theoretical model. Therefore, I next performed a factor analysis constrained to five factors (corresponding to the five variables of interest), and this analysis yielded five distinct factors. These five factors explained 76% of the variance in the responses of the interviewees. This indicates that the response data corresponded to the theoretical design of the questionnaire, indicating good validity.

I calculated Cronbach's alpha values for each of the five factors. Cronbach's alpha is a reliability measure that reflects the extent to which all items in a questionnaire or scale, measure the same global content. Index values range from zero to one, with values above 0.7 indicating satisfactory reliability (Rubio, 2009). The reliability analysis indicated that the level of reliability of the factors, excluding the third factor, was higher than 0.7. With regard to the third factor, there was low reliability (alpha = 0.51). Question 16 was part of this factor but significantly reduced the reliability score; therefore, I chose to omit this question. After removing question 16, all five factors had good reliability. These reliability results are summarized in Table 2.

Normality. Parametric tests of significance, which were part of the data analysis for this study, assume that the distribution of the variables included in the analysis is normal. To test for normality, I computed the kurtosis statistic, which indicates normality as the kurtosis value approaches 0. The statistical value divided by its standard error should also be larger than 2 in absolute value. Table 3 shows the kurtosis values and their standard errors for the pre- and post-intervention results.

The findings presented in Table 3 show that all the factors were normally distributed, so parametric statistics could be used to analyze the results.

Hypothesis testing. Quantitative data analysis was performed using independent sample t test analyses. These tests allowed me to test all research hypotheses by determining whether the means of answers to the questions varied before and after the intervention. All quantitative data analysis was conducted in SPSS version 20 software.

Results

Sample Demographics

Twenty-two participants completed the questionnaire before and after the intervention. The mean age of the participants was 40.6 (SD = 14.3), and the median age was 39. Ages ranged between 15.5 and 71 years. The gender distribution showed

Table 2: Factor analysis results

Factor	Questions	% of variance explained by factor	Cronbach's alpha
Awareness of marketing processes	1,2,11,12,18,20	22%	0.86
Mistaken marketing attitudes	3,4,16,19	15%	0.72
Incorrect marketing process beliefs	6,7,8,14,17,21	14%	0.67
Organizational marketing skills	9,10,13	13%	0.71
Marketing need awareness	5,15	12%	0.68

Table 3: Normality test results

Factor	Pre-intervention		Post-intervention	
	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
Awareness of marketing process	0.29	0.95	0.81	0.97
Mistaken marketing attitudes	0.09	0.95	0.56	0.97
Incorrect attitudes to marketing processes	0.88	0.95	0.61	0.97
Organizational marketing skills	0.37	0.95	0.36	0.97
Awareness of need for marketing	0.10	0.95	0.71	0.97

Table 4: Pre/post comparison of survey variable means

	Pre-KM		Post-KM		t test findings	
	Mean	SD*	Mean	SD	t	p
Awareness of marketing processes	3.60	0.86	4.13	0.46	-1.98	0.06**
Marketing attitudes	3.01	0.86	2.53	0.83	1.75	0.09**
Marketing process beliefs	2.98	0.59	2.59	0.50	2.13	0.05**
Organizational marketing skills	2.11	0.88	2.28	0.65	-0.48	0.63
Marketing need awareness	3.29	0.89	3.69	0.58	-2.05	0.05**

* SD=standard deviation

** Difference in means is significant at the $p < 0.1$ level

Figure 1: Distribution of answers by variable



that 50% were males and 45.5% were females. One participant did not answer the question about gender. The majority (63%) of participants had a college education; a minority (16%) had only elementary-level education.

Distribution of answers by variable is depicted in Figure 1. The marked effect of the intervention on answers can be seen visually, especially questions 11, 12, 18 and 20 (awareness of marketing processes), as well as questions 4 and 14 (incorrect marketing attitudes).

Hypothesis Testing

Table 4 (previous page) lists the values of the five variables included in the study, before and after participation in the programme, as well as the statistical significance of t tests conducted for difference.

The first hypothesis stated that the intervention programme would help increase awareness of the need for marketing. After the intervention, the mean need awareness score increased from 3.29 to 3.69 ($p = .05$), indicating a slight, but significant increase in awareness of the need for marketing. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 is **accepted**. As a result of participation in the programme, there was a significant increase in the level of awareness of the need for marketing among participants.

The second hypothesis stated that the intervention programme would help reduce mistaken marketing attitudes. After the intervention, the mean mistaken marketing score

decreased from 3.01 to 2.53 ($p = .09$), indicating a moderate decrease in mistaken marketing attitudes. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is **accepted**. As a result of participation in the programme, there was a significant decrease in the level of mistaken marketing attitudes.

The third hypothesis stated that the intervention programme would help increase awareness of marketing processes. After the intervention, the mean awareness score increased from 3.60 to 4.13 ($p = .06$), indicating a significant, increase in awareness of marketing processes. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is **accepted**. As a result of participation in the programme, there was a significant rise in the level of awareness of the marketing process.

The fourth hypothesis stated that the intervention programme would help reduce incorrect beliefs about marketing processes. After the intervention, the mean score for this variable decreased from 2.98 to 2.59 ($p = .05$), indicating a slight, yet significant decrease in incorrect attitudes toward marketing processes.

Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is **accepted**. As a result of participation in the programme, there was a significant decrease in the level of incorrect attitudes toward marketing processes.

The fifth hypothesis stated that the intervention programme would help improve organisational marketing skills. Although there was a very slight increase in organisational marketing

scores (from 2.11 to 2.28), the results of the t test indicated that this result was non-significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is **rejected**. There was no change in the organisation's perceived marketing skills before and after the intervention.

Additional Observations

Before the intervention, although the employees had a high level of awareness about the marketing process, they displayed moderately incorrect attitudes about marketing and marketing procedures. Furthermore, their awareness of the need for marketing was mediocre, and the level of their organisational skills for creating a marketing process was low.

Interestingly, the standard deviations for all factors except marketing attitudes were lower after participation in the intervention. This finding could be interpreted as an indicator that gaps in knowledge about marketing issues and practices diminished after the intervention, thus causing the organizations to be more homogenous in marketing knowledge. These findings are discussed in further detail in the following section.

Discussion

The results demonstrated that, among this research sample, the intervention increased scores for four of the five dimensions of marketing knowledge: marketing need awareness, marketing attitudes, awareness of marketing processes, and marketing process beliefs. This finding is in accordance with existing literature related to continued professional development and organizational learning. Scholars have suggested that metaphorical language can be useful in teaching new concepts to adults (Bremer and Lee, 2007; Cornelissen, 2003; Durgee and Chen, 2006; Fillis and Rentschler, 2008; Mills, 2009). Additionally, organizational learning can take place in a group setting and that social learning can reduce mistaken marketing attitudes since members of the group can assist each other in learning (Fraser et al., 2007; Van Lange et al., 2011; Wenger, 2000).

The researcher did not observe a significant change in organizational marketing skills following the intervention. In some ways, this finding accord with existing literature suggesting that organizational culture is very difficult to change and that change usually takes place on a surface level, without penetrating to the level of values and assumptions (Schein, 1990). However, scholars have suggested that it is possible to change organizational behavior through training over time (Berson et al., 2008). Future research should focus on understanding barriers to organizational change and ways to overcome those barriers through intervention, perhaps using qualitative approaches.

The literature indicates that SMEs have unique characteristics distinguishing them from larger businesses. On the one hand, these characteristics contribute to their existence and growth (e.g., through their agility in business conduct), but, on the other hand, the same characteristics threaten SMEs' survival. The literature suggests that lack of marketing knowledge among SMEs causes a large number to fail prematurely (Buchanan and Evesson 2004; Boyle and Desai, 1991; BDI-Coface, 2006). The re-

sults of this study coincide with existing research, particularly with respect to the notion that, in SMEs, the line between sales and marketing is often blurred, leading to an overemphasis on sales and a detrimental de-emphasis of marketing (McCartan-Quinn and Carson, 2003).

Scholars (e.g., Barney, 1986; Xenikou and Simosi, 2006) have continually suggested that a lack of ability to use marketing tools in daily business can harm SMEs' ability to adapt to the business environment. However, research indicates that professional advice, including interventions in the form of continued professional development, can contribute to SME success over the long term (Maron and Lussier, 2014). Therefore, a validated marketing intervention is needed to improve SMEs' marketing knowledge and ability, thereby promoting their success and contributing to national economies.

This study was, to our knowledge, the first to test a standardized marketing intervention designed specifically for SMEs. There were several limitations that should be taken into consideration. First, as an exploratory study, it was based on a convenience sampling method. It is not unlikely, therefore, that the sample is biased in the sense that it included organizations that were actively seeking change. This sampling method reduces the generalizability of the findings. The small number of individual participants also limits generalizability. A further limitation of the research stems from the fact that the design of the intervention program and its evaluation were both carried out by the same researcher. Therefore, once again, there is the possibility of evaluating bias in the data and in reported findings, caused by the professional involvement of the researcher with the research topic. Relatedly, the small sample of participants working directly with the researcher during the intervention may have led to social desirability bias in participants' responses (Weisberg, 2005). Every effort was made to limit bias during the research process, but future research should attempt to replicate our results in other settings. Additionally, longer term follow-up is needed to verify that increases in marketing knowledge that result from the intervention in fact lead to improved business outcomes.

Conclusions

The current study provides preliminary evidence that the metaphor- and storyline-based intervention is an effective CPD program for SMEs. Tock and Baharub (2010) stressed the need for an intervention that effectively educates SME businesses to use marketing concepts, methods, and strategies that will enable them to compete in their field, Mills stressed that metaphors may be a useful tool for teaching marketing (Mills, 2009). The intervention and similar tools could be a solution to the reported paucity of practical marketing information for SMEs (Reijonen, 2010; Simpson et al., 2006; Walsh and Lipinski, 2009), because the intervention presents a way of making marketing methods accessible while accommodating the specific marketing needs of participant organisations.

Given these findings, metaphor- and storyline-based intervention appears to have strong utility and could be used beneficially in other SME settings or by practitioners. However, the study also revealed some areas which warrant further devel-

opment of such interventions. In particular, it was not clear that the intervention led to lasting results in organizational culture in the form of organizational marketing skills. Therefore, there is room for improvement of the intervention tool in order to better enable the demonstrated improvements in marketing knowledge to translate into lasting, fundamental changes in the organizational culture.

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