

## **TRAVELS WITH THE FLYING DUTCHMAN: MARKETING MANAGERS, MARKETING PLANNING AND THE METAPHORS OF PRACTICE**

### **ABSTRACT**

*A review of the literature on strategic marketing planning reveals that the manner in which it is carried out in practice does not appear to reflect the way in which it is written about in texts. It is also clear that the exploration of marketing processes in organisations is seriously neglected from a phenomenological perspective. In order to explore this area, and the lived reality of planning from marketing managers perspectives, a research methodology was adopted using the phenomenological interview. A key research question focused investigation on determining what successful marketing decision making expertise actually consists of, if it is not about the explicit skills and knowledge embedded in the rational technical model of planning.*

*The subsequent phenomenological analysis of the interviews demonstrated that the complexity of marketing planning and individual action cannot be collapsed into a textual model. What managers drew on was a qualitative, locally constructed knowledge base. Marketing decision making and action was found to be based within a locally enacted hermeneutical circle of talk, relationships, tacit knowledge and emergent issues, where the plans they wrote acted as cues to action rather than as prescriptive guides. Based on these findings, a revised theoretical framework is proposed for understanding marketing planning. This framework draws on the socially constructed metaphors used by the marketing managers in this study to explain their practical activity. It is argued that this theoretical approach offers up ideas for action to other marketers, rather than prescriptions. It also indicates that much marketing activity is successful yet diverse, both in form and style.*

### **INTRODUCTION: THE CRISIS OF THE RATIONAL TECHNICAL MODEL OF MARKETING PLANNING**

From a detailed examination of leading texts and articles on marketing planning, it is clear that there exists one major view on how to conceptualise theory and practice (McDonald 1999; Dibb and Simkin 2000). A review of some of the literature on the topic reveals however, that there exist significant problems with the conventional perspective on strategic marketing planning (Piercy and Giles 1989; Saker and Speed 1992). Some important empirical studies have indicated that in practice, the way in which marketing decision making is executed fails to a large extent to reflect the way in which it is written about in texts (Greenley 1988; Greenley and Bayus 1993). Other studies point to major problems with specific marketing decision making tools, for example Armstrong and Brodie (1994). Some marketing authors point to the failure of marketing planning as a result of implementation difficulties, locating problems in the realms of inadequate skills, lack of marketing knowledge and the way in which internal cultures are managed (Simkin 2002). These approaches however, never really question the way in which conventional marketing planning is presented ontologically and epistemologically, but instead, has actually led some academics to redouble their efforts on its behalf (McDonald 2003; Greenley et al., 2004). It is argued that none of these approaches are likely to be able to advance very

significantly our view of how marketing is actually successfully implemented and managed in practice.

In much of the literature, the conventional model of the strategic marketing planning process and the resultant plan, is standardised and considered applicable to all possible types of business organisation in all types of situations (Brooksbank 1996). There is clearly present a strong tendency towards establishing a reductionist technical rationality (Dunne 1999), where marketing planning is conceptualised and grounded within a systemic, universally relevant and modernist framework (Robson and Rowe 1997). The traditional perspective suggests that all the researcher needs to do is to uncover unproblematic general laws and then generalisations of a prescriptive nature can be made about marketing planning activity. In contrast to this, Gummesson (2002a) argues that there exists a very significant gap between marketing textbooks and the reality he came across as a marketing consultant and manager.

It is argued in this paper that marketing is a reality mediated by the local contexts in which organisational actors operate. The idiographic and intuitive approach to marketing, as advocated by Gummesson (1987), means that each situation is treated uniquely. The prescriptive approach to planning largely ignores the subjective worlds of those who have to carry out marketing for real. To present textual frameworks as reality reduces the complex interpretations and actions of individuals in organisations to a guileless and functional predetermination. Kent (1986) argues that there is no independent reality waiting to be uncovered, but what exists are the phenomenologically based realities of marketing managers. In practice, few studies of marketing management adopt an ethnographic perspective and fewer still attempt to explore how marketing is actually managed in practice (O'Driscoll and Murray 1998; Hackley 2001). One recent exception is the research of Ashill et al., (2003), who advocate a grounded theory approach to the study of marketing planning, which takes into account actor's social construction of reality.

In order to understand this dimension of action, a research project was undertaken, which utilised a phenomenological methodology. This approach was adopted in order to explore the meanings that actors, in this case senior marketing personnel, attached to organisational reality. It was considered necessary to know how managers actually go about perceiving marketing planning and how they act on their interpretations. A key research question was identified, which focused investigation on establishing what marketing planning decision making consists of in practice, if it is not about the skills and knowledge represented by the current, dominant model. It is argued that while a quantitative methodology, employing a questionnaire based approach, can provide insights into marketing planning, it cannot uncover the richness and complexity of the lifeworlds of those working and making marketing decisions.

## **THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The subject matter of phenomenology begins with consciousness and experience (Giorgi 1992;1994). A phenomenological perspective views society and organisations as being composed of differing perceptions of reality. The self is seen as existential and any attempt to understand social reality must be grounded in people's perceptions of that social reality. This reality has already been made sense of by its adherents and so the researcher must try to understand actor's interpretative devices which provide

the background to action (Silverman 1970). Moustakas (1994), in discussing data collection, points out that the central technique in phenomenological research is the in-depth interview. The purpose of the interview is to describe and understand the central themes that those being researched experience. The intention of this research project was to get access to a differentiated range of situations, in order to try and make sense of the perceptions of marketing managers' approaches to marketing planning. In this respect, it was thought that there was no ideal number of companies to research, because it is suggested that each will have a unique approach to marketing and as Garfinkel (1984) points out, there is no master reality to uncover. Participants had to be sought out who could articulate their experiences and the phenomenon dictated the method. Sampling involving notions of generalisability were rejected, as this can be seen as incompatible with an interpretivist approach which sees the data of the study as an end in itself (Hackley 2003). Additionally only a limited number of people can be interviewed in a phenomenological inquiry as a vast amount of data can emerge from even just one interview (Hycner 1985).

Thomas (1993), points out that access in a qualitative study is both time consuming and difficult. With this in mind, considerable effort was put into obtaining and scrutinising a number of lists of local organisations operating in the area of the study. These lists were principally obtained from the local chamber of commerce. Over eighty different marketing managers were written to, using a standard letter, asking for interview access. In the end, twenty four interviews were completed with marketing managers representing a wide range of small, medium and large sized organisations. A key criteria in selecting organisational members to interview, was that respondents had responsibility for writing marketing plans. All interviews were recorded and transcripts made of each. Respondents came from printing, building contracting, book publishing, meat slicing equipment manufacture, financial services, retailing, computer hardware and software, professional services, public sector leisure, television, consultancy, and a charity. Also interviewed were marketing managers from manufacturers of beauty products, handbags, paint brushes, packaging equipment and small electrical motors. Interview data revealed that virtually without exception, all these organisations were successful.

For the purpose of this paper, all respondents and their companies have been made anonymous. Fictitious names have been adopted in all cases, both for the companies of this study and individuals representing these companies. This has been done from the point of view of confidentiality, in order to protect the privacy of respondents. As Kvale (1996) points out, the protection of interviewees, by the altering of names and features that might identify them, is a central issue in the reporting of interviews. Although some information has been changed for the purposes of this paper then, no changes in meaning have occurred. On a related issue, in the initial letter sent to all interviewees, the point was made that anonymity would be guaranteed at all times and additionally, all respondents have had access to a draft report on which this paper is based. All respondents were made fully aware that findings would be put into the public domain. No manager has queried this approach, in the knowledge that they cannot be personally identified.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995), suggest that for qualitative interviews, an interview guide is constructed, which makes available to the interviewer a set of predetermined questions which can engage the respondent and establish the area of investigation.

Such a guide was prepared and used for all interviews, but not in any rigid or prescriptive manner. The use of the guide did vary from one interview to the next, in some cases being central to the conversation, in other situations becoming rather more marginal. The interview guide for this project was designed to be tentative and contingent and to not resemble the approach used in standardised survey interviewing. The majority of interviews were conducted on the organisations premises. The study here, which was carried out in a situation of guaranteed confidentiality, was about rapport being seen as a methodology for listening. In phenomenological analysis, the common mode of presenting findings is through the use of selected quotes, exemplifying the research analysis. Quotes drawn from the interviews enabled the process of meaning condensation to occur (Kvale 1996). Here, the interviewee responses were broken down into meaning units and examined in terms of the themes of the study.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE METAPHORS OF PRACTICE**

### ***The Local Logic Of Marketing Planning***

For Shankar et al., (2001), metaphors represent one of the main types of human argument, having a central place in the explanation of events. Metaphors have been shown in this study to impact on managerial practice in the form of symbolic constructs where the practitioner world is constituted as a network of subjective meanings (Smircich 1983). By using metaphors as organising frameworks, drawn from the words of marketing managers, new theoretical perspectives on marketing have been generated. Here, interpretative metaphors can act as theory, a theory which draws on the complexities of practice. In a given context, metaphors can be seen as being useful in terms of analysing and imposing structure on research material (Tsoukas 1991). Davies and Chun (2003), note that marketing is saturated with metaphors. The problem for much current marketing theory however, is that most metaphors are pre - given. The notions of a product life cycle, a wheel of retailing, a channel of distribution, a marketing mix, these and others, can all be judged as being representative of objective marketing laws. They are not metaphors which are rooted within the practices of most marketing managers, but within prescriptive theory. As an important alternative, the socially constructed metaphor is a device which can provide substantial potential for theory development (Clegg and Grey 1996). In any research study, theory explication has an important role to play. As Miles and Huberman (1990) explain, researchers want to understand and to explain coherently, why things take place as they do. For Weick (1989 p157), good theory is ...

“a plausible theory...interesting rather than obvious, irrelevant or absurd, obvious in novel ways, a source of unexpected connections, high in narrative rationality, aesthetically pleasing or correspondent with known realities.”

Metaphors are plausible because they represent the meanings actors work with. Research by Hampden Turner (1994), using metaphors as theoretical constructs, revealed the mental charts used by managers in the creation and management of meaning. This also suggests that the theory put forward by an organising metaphor may well be novel, in that it will reflect the nature of marketing reality, unburdened by a need to conform to traditional thinking. In this study, analysis and theory

development took place around key metaphors used by interviewees, as they sought to explain the nature of various marketing processes in their organisations.

### *Navigating Tankers and Flotillas: Managers Making Sense Of Marketing*

The interviews carried out for this study clearly demonstrate that respondents saw their organisations as being largely successful. This shows that any failure to adhere to the traditional marketing planning model does not lead automatically to an indifferent performance, or to commercial ruin. One of the largest companies represented in this study is the financial services firm, Nelson Universal. Robin Cawley, the marketing manager of the general insurance division, in commenting on the size and success of his firm pointed out that "...we are a big tanker...." He went on to say that,

"The bit I am talking about is still annually over £100 billion premium income, so huge amounts of money. In the last few years we have generated around about £100 million of profit."

Smaller firms are also represented in this study, what Robin Cawley refers to as the "little flotillas". One of these companies is Jenkins Print. A family owned business. Irving Wallace, the marketing director commented that,

" The printing site, we are one of the largest co-ordinated print sites in the country, and we have three very large presses which print 64 pages a turn and they are turning 30,000 times an hour so there is a fair amount of through put."

The notion of big tankers and little flotillas already suggests that large and small companies have to manage their marketing differently. This difference of perception becomes marked when managers discuss their definitions of marketing. The senior marketing managers in this study, in the main, had different perceptions of what marketing is. These different definitions of marketing inform action, and represent the approach used by managers to its organisation and implementation. For most managers, marketing was not be defined in any abstract way outside of their own activity frame. At Jenkins department store, part of the family owned business mentioned above, when asked how marketing is defined, Roy Sands, the sales and marketing director commented that,

"As far as we are concerned, it is promoting Jenkins as a brand to achieve the best sales results we can with the resources that we have available and within the sales promotional budget."

A specific organisationally focused definition of marketing is also shared by Clive Terry of Thor Engineering a meat slicing equipment manufacturer, who said that it's, "exploring the needs of manufacturers and gearing our design efforts to solve their problems."

The comments from these and other marketing managers in the study, illustrate the idea of indexicality, a central concept used by ethnomethodologists (Benson and Hughes 1983).The general idea here is that the sense of any object is derived from its context or is `indexed` to a particular situation. Accounts, like actions, are understood

by reference to a large number of unstated assumptions. For organisational members, it becomes difficult to make sense of what marketing is, if abstracted from local contexts. A good illustration of this comes from Guy Martin Managing director of Media K, a marketing and design consultancy. No one is likely to present more of a universal definition of marketing, but the reverse is actually the case.

“...because we are in the business of selling marketing, we package it differently, according to the demand we perceive for it, which I believe is only good marketing in itself. So the answer to your question is, it moves, it changes.”

### ***Building Your Own Picture: Perceptions Of Business Environments And Markets***

If we consider the structure of the conventional marketing planning process it starts with the collection and interpretation of data from the business environment, using a systematic, overarching structured approach (McDonald 1999). The case is that in this study, managers individually produce aspects of the environment they face, in the much the way that Weick (1995) suggests. The environment is not a fixed objective entity, but is embedded in the local context and local rationality of manager's worlds. Findings in this study show that little attention is paid to examining the environment using a structured process. Out of twenty four interviews, only four managers reported that their organisations completed a fully structured environmental analysis. Additionally, conventional marketing research was found to be neglected by many managers, in favour of other more informal information gathering methods. Guy Martin of Media K probably speaks for the majority of managers. When asked if he undertook a full environmental analysis, he responded by saying,

“No, No...I just want to know how the opposition is disposed around me, I want to know what the market generally is, and I am looking at the way in which our particular client needs are changing...it is not worth spending thousands of pounds and huge amounts of revenue trying to find out what is happening, because we are crossing a spread of very different areas. To get good enough information, it probably could be better, but the cost of it would be disproportionate.”

The notion of a subjective, informal approach to environmental analysis is based on what managers perceive to be suitable to their local conditions, a point reinforced by Clive Terry, of Thor Engineering. The acquisition of data through talk, rather than through more formal means also emerges. Terry stresses the point about competitor knowledge as central to analysis.

“.....In terms of direct competition, we will know more or less how many units have been sold in the UK by different suppliers, we do get to know pretty much what is happening with the service engineers visiting different people.”

The traditional marketing planning model exhorts managers to undertake extensive research (Tammo et al 1996). In this study, there is little evidence to suggest that the majority of managers follow the dictates of the prescriptive research model. What seems to be the case is that the information which is collected varies according to the perceptions of the marketing managers as to what is locally important. Whilst being aware of the many different types of research available, Sheila Harris of Henry Armstrong, a major paintbrush manufacturer, points out that,

“... their importance will vary, depending on what it is you are trying to find out really, if you are trying to build up a picture of the market.”

In drawing a picture of a field, for example the artist has to create their own version of reality. There is no question that the field does not exist, as with an organisational member's environment, but both can only be given meaning through the individual's representation and their belief in what is important.

### ***The Black Art Of Marketing Planning....***

Findings from the research, based on the perceptions of interviewees, indicate that plans are written by the marketing managers in this study. These plans are not driven by what the prescriptive approach says, but by the rationality of local circumstances. For Weick (2001), if environments are locally constructed, then by consequence, plans must be as well. Gordon Willis, managing director of Mitre Technics, a manufacturing company in the micro electronics market, was asked if he drew up a marketing plan. Clearly there is a considerable amount of contextual detail contained in his plan.

“ Yes, very detailed, it is a five year marketing strategy, with a three year firmer strategy...we run on a one year firm, fixed cash flow to the market type budget... It starts off with what we believe we will be able to sell ...and then it breaks it down into everything, into how many people we are going to employ, how much costs are on travelling, what will be the overtime, what will be the material and we analyse that, and we put actuals against forecasts...we monitor all the time.”

At Archer television marketing manager Michael Marston was asked about his approach to marketing planning. Here, the local quality of the process came across very strongly.

“The long term plans that we do is based on the utilisation of studio, so we would look at the potential markets, so that is other programme channels and set a target for the end of the year to say we hope that we would have X hours of production or X hours of utilisation of studio, or post production facilities or indeed personnel or a combination of all three.”

A major part of the belief system of marketing is represented by the analytical tools of planning. Despite continued questions being raised about their relevance and validity to practitioners (Brown 2001; Meldrum 1994), this study found that up to half of the marketing managers interviewed used these tools, but in varying ways. For some, the tools help the manager to establish very broad basic guidelines, being of assistance in orientating them to matters of marketing analysis. These same managers however, then quickly moved to local knowledge to further direct strategy. Brown (2001) equates the tools of marketing with religious rites and rituals, which are supposed to confer ways of understanding the marketing world on users. Tools like the Boston matrix and the Directional policy matrix are not in practice magic squares. For the majority of the managers here, analytical tools do not and cannot, prescribe exact strategic remedies, as Robin Cawley of Nelson Universals points out.

“...those principles and theories need to be understood...but if you just religiously adopt a dogma...you know, there is a kind of quest for the truth here, there is no truth...so I think it [the directional policy matrix] is a useful input to the decision process, but it can't be the only one and that is equally true of every one of those different tools.”

For the many managers who do not use the tools at all, marketing decision making is constituted by other factors like talk and relationships. Jerry court of Morris Grout a major building contractor, states that the Boston matrix is,

“...good to talk about over the dinner table maybe, but I didn't really find there was proper use for it. I have been with the company twenty five years, I know what we can do and I hope I can pass that out to the people in my department, and it is a matter of getting out, finding out who to talk to, going to see them building relationships, and you do that as much by personality as Boston matrixes.”

This point about relationships is important in other ways as well. This study found that in terms of marketing outcomes, the most significant variables were not those of the marketing mix, but instead, what figured strongly, were relationships, quality and service. This largely reflects the thinking and experiences of Gummesson (2002b). This study found that the four Ps were not the principal organising framework for delivering marketing despite their central presence in authoritative marketing texts like Doyle, (2002). At Stirling Publisher, Jason Hobart, the marketing director, pointed out that,

“in the marketing plan you will not see the four Ps...it becomes a bit slavish.... I would rather talk about understanding markets, understanding how you reach end users, and how understanding how you continue your business as usual, sales to those markets, how you get incremental sales to those markets, how you get loyalty, so during the year we have got a growing loyal base.”

The central theme of this section is captured in the metaphor used by Clive Terry of Thor Engineering. His comments show that variations exist in the knowledge base in his industry and by implication, approaches to planning as well. This is the case even when fairly similar products are being made and marketed.

“I suppose to some extent it does tend to be a black art. As I say, half a dozen customers can be doing the same thing, manufacture the same product, but they are all doing it in a slightly different way, and their way is best...”

It can be argued here that in the context that Clive Terry is using the term ‘black art’, suggests that the knowledge he refers to is not easily acquired, being secretive and esoteric. To fully understand the codes and ways of the industry one would have to be initiated into it and learn from others. (Boden 1994p35), calls this the ‘indexicality of particulars’, where meaning is constituted in, and by, the interaction of individuals and objects within the concrete conditions of a particular setting.



### ***Marketing Decision Making: Fighting In a Swamp...***

Importantly, this study found that marketing strategy emerges not out of linear marketing plans but out of current situations and opportunities. There appears to be a constant reflexive and retrospective quality to decision making. Managers make sense out of past experiences and then develop strategy as an ongoing stream of events. Media K's managing director Guy Martin captures the essence of this with his metaphor when he states that,

“If you are wandering along with your army, fighting your battles and all that, at some point you have got to go over the next hill and see what is there and look back and see how you are.”

One way in which emergent strategy develops, is from within relationships and networks. In this context, negotiations are a central and on going part of the decision making process (Gilmore 2001). Robin Cawley of Nelson Universals, talks about building relationships with financial services retailers. He uses a maritime metaphor, and talks about “getting retailers on board... If you can get the retailer on board, then the customer who comes to the retailer will receive a recommendation to be with Nelson Universal...”

Talk is very important in terms of decision making, but is often neglected by traditional models of planning, with its macro type emphasis on structures and systems (Boden 1994). The latter argues that the omission of a micro social action perspective prevents a proper understanding of the reality of organisational life. The study here shows that managers see talk as a central aspect of strategy. At the building contractor Samsons, Mary Stone the marketing manager is guided in her talk activity by the principle of reciprocity. She has to empathise with significant others in her network and understand what they require.

. “You know, we always try to be very nice to people, because you never know what you might need yourself. I mean, I have to speak to people and try and get work from people, so I always put myself in other peoples shoes.”

Hackley (1999), states the tacit area of practical knowledge refers to action which is left out of abstracted theoretical descriptions, but on which the accomplishment of action depends. A person who is highly accomplished in strategic marketing decision making is likely to be able to utilise sophisticated and experientially mediated concepts in coping with marketing issues. At Vincent Duke, Mike Clark indicates that a lot of financial services marketing decisions making “...is done on basic instincts, followed by a gut feel. In talking about the senior strategists approach in his firm to making marketing decisions, he goes on to say that,

“It is just a kind of instinctive knowledge of what he needs to set his business up...I mean Brian has got an instinct for things and a bit of a nose for what is right and what is wrong.”

Irving Wallace of Jenkins Print draws our attention to this aspect of marketing decision making as well.

“You have...the conscious incompetence, and the unconscious incompetence, the conscious competence and the unconscious competence and when marketing philosophy gets into the unconscious competence you know what is the right thing to do instinctively...”

For Hales (1986), a great deal of management time is not spent on planning, controlling and organising, but on day to day trouble shooting and ad hoc problem solving. For many managers in this study, the work is about being immersed in what Weick (1995p44) calls a situation of ‘thrownness’. At Jenkins Print, Irving Wallace gives voice to this issue when he explains how he views his role.

“Inevitably the day to day tends to overwhelm the long term because it is usual alligators in the swamp isn’t it. I think most of the time you are fighting alligators, you have to make the time, step away from it, get the long term produced as well.”

David Borrows of Leighton Jay Technical Services, company marketing educational software, underscores this when he says,

“What you find is there is always a situation where you end up getting involved in a more hands on way than you should be. As a marketing director, it would be nice to be able to sit back and just think strategic thoughts all day but the reality is there just isn’t the freedom, there is an element involved in responding to things instantly...”

Finally and very significantly, the research makes clear that the marketing managers of this study do not appear to follow the plans they write very closely, despite considerable effort and thought being put into their construction. What is the role of the written plans then? For Weick (2001), the role of strategic plans is to animate and orientate people. Once organisational members act in a social setting, they produce tangible outcomes. From the latter cues are extracted, which help to provide people with an image of where they are going. In this study, locally constructed marketing plans do have a very important role to play because they have the capacity to evoke action. The marketing plans talked about here, act as a point of reference, generating cognitive activity leading to action. Weick (2001), points out that any old plan will work in an organisation because it is often sufficient to get the company moving, making it possible to learn what is going on and deciding what needs to be done. It is what managers and employees do which is important, not what they plan. At the financial services firm of Vincent Duke, Mike Clark the marketing manager speaks for most managers in this study when he suggests that the marketing plan acts as a rudder, giving organisational members a sense of direction and purpose.

“...given that things are constantly changing...but if you didn’t have the plan, you would be a rudderless ship.”

## **CONCLUSION: TOWARDS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST ACCOUNTS OF MARKETING THEORY AND PRACTICE**

What these research findings achieve in doing is to critically address the current and dominant structure of knowledge in marketing planning practice. It is argued here that marketing is composed of differing perspectives and practice and that the discipline could be enriched by adopting a more exploratory framework in the pursuit of this

knowledge. In the traditional model, marketing planning procedures are known, and systemically presented. Alternatively, it could be argued that the knowledge base of marketing is in fact always contingent and tentative, rather than permanent and overarching. Further research into marketing is likely to uncover different metaphors in use and hence different types of knowledge. Gummesson (2002b), argues that scholars are like Flying Dutchmen, doomed to travel, never being allowed to dock in a harbour. The search for and belief in a general theory of marketing is probably illusory, when confronted by the reality of marketing managers local experiences and knowledge.

Simon (1994), points out that managers are valuable sources of information, where they are conveyors of an understanding that is rarely exploited in research into marketing. This study shows that managers, despite knowing about traditional marketing frameworks, think in natural language, where they often resort to metaphors. These metaphors have become the basis for rules of thumb action and as guides to conduct. It is argued that 'metaphors as theory' could have important implications for the way in which marketing is learnt about. A new and important source of marketing knowledge could be arrived at through the concept of 'communities of practice' (Wenger and Synder 2000). Here, learning is achieved through doing, in a framework of social participation. These learning communities could represent a rich and diverse source of new marketing theories, based in social practice, rather than in abstracted technical rational prescriptions (Brown and Duguid 1991). New marketing knowledge could be developed using metaphors in action research and action learning contexts. Locally constructed theories of marketing could be used as educational and training devices, to ensure that the notion of a 'marketing strategy' becomes more contested and grounded in practitioner reality. A revised approach to the development and implementation of marketing planning, using the insights gained from the metaphors of practice approach, could also be used. For the managers in this study, metaphors are the way in which they generalise their experiences, representing stories and fragments of stories. The implications are that new strategies and marketing plans could be based around the metaphor, which could be seen as a narrative tool to be harnessed by organisational members.

Although this study has questioned traditional marketing, the case is that local marketing activity is both vigorous and inventive. A way forward then, might be to think seriously about the contribution of Brief and Dukerich (1991), to theory and apply it to marketing. They adopt the notion of 'practicality' in theory development. They suggest that theory should act as an idea generator, making it possible for practitioners to view their worlds in ways which they might not have done previously. Brief and Dukerich point out that theory should not be about advocating one useful way to do things in an applied setting, as prescriptive marketing theory suggests, but should be about being able to offer up various courses of action. The need is of course for this knowledge to be captured and disseminated. This is perhaps a major challenge facing marketing orthodoxy today. Why it is that one theory of marketing should dominate the discourse? The use of a variety of approaches could lead to the reinvigoration of marketing theory, to the adoption of more critical perspective and to the placing of practice in a more central position than it currently occupies in the academy.

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