

Articles of faith and mystic matrices: marketing textbooks and the misrepresentation of reality

Abstract

Paper type

Research paper

Purpose of this paper

This purpose of this paper is to show that theories of marketing, as evident in a range of key textbooks, represent a set of reified articles of faith, which are unreflective of the reality of the practitioner's world.

Design/Methodology/Approach

This paper draws on some interpretative research findings into the nature of marketing practice. A series of phenomenological interviews were carried out with senior marketing managers. Their views were compared with existing representations of marketing as it appears in a range of textbooks.

Findings

Marketing textbooks were found to be highly alike drawing as they do on a implicit systems based paradigm. The findings from the interviews show that marketing is a locally defined, highly contextualised activity that is dissimilar in many ways to the generalised prescriptions of mainstream textbooks.

Research implications

Scholarship in the form of textbooks should attempt to move away from the dictates of the dominant articles of faith as espoused by the established church of marketing. Differing interpretations of marketing should not be viewed as being heretical. They should be seen as being the result of diverse organisational contexts and outcomes which stem from the socially constructed nature of reality.

Originality

The contribution of this paper is to show that marketing in practice is not constituted by textbook theory, but by context and the individual perceptions of people as they carry out their actions and routines in organisations.

Keywords: *textbooks - phenomenology - articles of faith – social construction marketing practice*

“Through the process of guru creation and the making of a marketing mythology, concepts and principles suggested by a single author have, if they have been in tune with the times, had a remarkable tendency readily to become accepted articles of faith...” (Kent, 1998, p139)

MARKETING THEORY: HIGH PRIESTS AND ARTICLES OF FAITH

Writers of marketing textbooks are good at developing universal overarching theories of the discipline and setting them up as a basis for action. As Hackley (2003) argues, there is an inbuilt assumption in the majority of texts that marketing can be learnt in the abstract. This approach is evident in many leading texts, typical of the ones used on undergraduate marketing courses; see for example Jobber (2007), Kotler and Armstrong (2006), Brassington and Pettitt (2005); Dibb and Simkin et al (2006). Newer texts like Stokes and Lomax (2008) carry on this tradition. The theories referred to here are well rehearsed in the texts. Market segmentation variables exist as a priori truths. The product life cycle indicates the type of marketing response necessary at each of its stages. There is a normative communications planning model which emphasises a universal view of consumer behaviour. Marketing plans should adopt the same structure everywhere, irrespective of context or size of firm. These ‘articles of faith’ (Kent 1998p139), with their religious overtones, suggestive of a church of marketing, are informed by a hypothetic deductive approach rooted in a systems perspective. In marketing, it can be argued that a majority of textbook writers exist as a priestly type, having a faith in order and regularity. Robson and Rowe (1997), note that the current dominant theories of marketing are analogous to a false religion, where belief is required in a totalising system of knowledge.

The assumption is that we start from an abstractly generated theory and then move into the real world (Tapp and Hughes 2008). Marketing textbooks conform to this positivistic model, where marketing action is seen as either being consistent with a theory or as an aberrant deviation from it. In contrast, practice suggests that marketing theory as espoused in textbooks is rarely found (Edwards 2005). Yet still we continue to perpetuate these frameworks as being eminently useful. This paper argues that what is out there instead, is a range of disparate practices and marketing activities. The latter first and foremost conform to a local logic of action and not to some abstract system of marketing thought. In order to examine marketing practice from an interpretative perspective, which attempts to highlight the discrepancies between the theory of textbooks and reality, an inquiry based on a phenomenological approach was adopted. Results are reported that suggest the textbook format currently in use needs a radical rethink, in order to incorporate the ethnography of the marketing practitioner. It is not one overarching positivistic theory with attendant models that we should be looking for, but many socially mediated theories. It seems clear that most standard marketing texts appear to assume that all action is activated through technical theory (Dunne 1999), when in reality organisations are about a complex, interpreted social world. At the disposal of the interpretative researcher, are a range of emic techniques enabling us to better understand the vagaries of the practitioner’s world. These methods, largely underutilised in the study of marketing management, as opposed to consumer behaviour, include grounded theory, ethnography, the phenomenological interview and ethnomethodology (Goulding 2005; Ehigie and Ehigie 2005; Hassard 1990).

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. Apart from the selection of often terse case studies in texts by authors, there is little engagement with the narrative form as expressed in the words of actual marketing managers. Short vignettes are put side by side with passages on marketing theory. Rarely do we see marketing practice articulated from the perspective of those who implement it. As a consequence, whether or not marketing principles were actually employed becomes very difficult to determine. As Hackley (2003p1342) points out, "Marketing texts offer little ethnographic or other contextual information..." Tapp and Hughes (2008), make the important point that marketing is not amenable to study by an abstract and generalised method. It is a social construct almost impossible to externalise outside of dialogue and debate.

Marketing management is hence a complex and nebulous phenomenon. Tapp and Hughes (2008) call for the applied academic to get nearer to this type of knowledge that is trans - disciplinary, reflecting the messy world of the practitioner. The next section outlines the research approach adopted in this study and then considers the findings and how they compare with standard textbook approaches to marketing. Relevant academic literature is also examined in this section. Finally, the conclusion offers some thoughts on how a revised perspective could be used to enhance and change the present structure of the marketing textbook.

THE RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative research can take different approaches Wright (2008). One area is phenomenology. The latter emerged out of a developing discontent with a philosophy of science based on an account of measurable material things, which is the approach of positivism. Phenomenology takes into account the experiencing person and the connections between human consciousness and objects existing in the natural world. In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge and is a source that cannot be doubted (Moustakas, 1994). The object of a conscious act or experience is inseparable from the meaning attached to it. Experience is then intentional and meaning is at the heart of phenomenological understanding. Phenomenology tries to understand the way a person lives, creates and relates to the world. The phenomenological process describes what is perceived, sensed and known in one's immediate awareness and experience. What is utilised by the researcher is only the data that is available to consciousness and understanding is developed through the totality of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach involves an understanding of experience in order to obtain a comprehensive description that provides the basis for a reflective structural analysis. This is usually obtained through the open-ended interview, which is a first person's report of life experiences (Marshall and Rossman1999). These life experiences can often be articulated as narratives, further adding to the richness of the researcher's insights (Shankar and Goulding 2001).

A research study was undertaken then, using the phenomenological interview, which involved having conversations with senior marketing managers who could speak for marketing activity in their organisation. 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. Interviewees 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. For the purpose of this paper, all respondents and their companies have been made anonymous, along with the particular area of the country in which the interviews took place. In all cases, fictitious names have been adopted.

MARKETING'S ARTICLES OF FAITH: FINDING ALTERNATIVES

Firstly, it is worth noting here that virtually without exception all the managers interviewed were familiar with the technical language of academic marketing, from the four Ps to various strategic planning models. Generally though, these frameworks never really seemed to occupy the thinking of, or form a major part of these marketers discourse. It can be argued that textbook marketing knowledge is, after all, relatively easily acquired, unlike the experientially mediated skills and understanding demanded by the complex work practices of the professionals in this study. Brown (1998) has pointed out that what exists in textbooks is no trivial matter however. He suggests that it can be argued they represent the very essence of the marketing discipline, a point endorsed by Gummesson (1993; 2002). Kent (1986; 1998), has pointed out that much of marketing is sacred dogma, a feature sustained by ceremonial incantation. Arguably the latter is manifested through the marketing textbook. The research here suggests that practising managers have different perceptions of what marketing is, and different ways of talking about it, compared to the dictates of the high priests of the discipline who write these textbooks. As Kent (1986) notes, the first heretics to question the teachings of the church of marketing can be traced back to the early sixties. This paper can be seen to fall within this 'heretical' tradition and the following sections take issue with some of the established 'articles of faith'. Hackley (1998), goes some way in confirming this position. He points out that marketing exists in many forms in the life world, where it possesses its own distinctive discursive structures, ones which are markedly different from ones existing in the textbooks.

Article of faith: there is only one definition of marketing

One such article of faith is represented by the common definition of marketing used. In textbooks, standard definitions of marketing make little or no reference to context, for example the ones by Kotler and Armstrong (2006) and Brassington and Pettitt (2005). Marketing is defined universally, with little attention paid to the manner in which it might be interpreted by organisational members. A recent attempt by the Chartered Institute of Marketing (2007) to reformulate its definition of the discipline does not move away from universalism, despite its length and 'verbosity' (Charles 2007). Standard definitions can be seen as potentiality invalidating other marketing meanings and actions, which do not conform to the same pre-determined measures. In contrast, for most managers in the study here, marketing could not be defined in any abstract way outside of their own activity frame. A specific organisationally focused definition of marketing, representative of the general findings of this study, is offered by Roy Sands of Jenkins department store. When asked how marketing is defined, he 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 resource that we have available and within the sales promotional budget.”

General findings here indicate that the sense of any object is derived from its context, or is ‘indexed’ to a particular situation (Heritage 1984). For organisational actors, it becomes difficult to make sense of what marketing is, if abstracted from its local context. In considering definitions and their impact on practice, Robson and Rowe (1997) point out that a phenomenological study would be of great assistance in assessing the true role of selling in marketing. They postulate that a significant number of marketing academics claim that selling is actually extraneous to marketing activity. As Brown (2006p221) has pointed out, marketing is first and foremost about ‘selling stuff’ a point that sometimes seems to be obscured in marketing textbooks which often attempt to make scientific sounding statements about market oriented companies being more profitable than ones with selling orientations. Judging by some of the comments from managers in this study, selling is seen as being a very significant aspect of marketing. Jason Hobart, Marketing Director of Stirling Publisher;

“...marketing is at the end of the day selling, and you sell more by having the right product at the right price and knowing who the right people are to sell it to.”

It can be argued then, that success is not just about basing business activity on a single, ‘right’ way (Murray et al 2002). Robbin's (1991) in-depth case study analysis of a family company, found that although strategic marketing planning was absent, the company was prospering. Anecdotally, this type of situation is well recognised within the practitioner communities. The evidence seems to be strong that academic research in marketing fails to make much of an impression on marketing practitioners. From a survey of marketing managers McKenzie et al (2002) concluded that none of them regularly read an academic journal, and that the awareness of academic marketing journals among marketing managers is very low, even for journals that claim to have practitioners among their target audience. A recent survey of marketing research practitioners established that they find sources of information other than academic journals, mainly professional magazines and web sites, far more useful for professional purposes (Baines, et al 2006). It is interesting to note that marketing textbooks are nowhere mentioned in these studies as sources of instruction.

Article of faith: environments are objectively determined

Another central article of faith promulgated in textbooks is based on one which suggests the environment can be represented and analysed in an objective manner. In most marketing texts, there is at least one chapter which represents the environment and its constituent factors in a relatively straightforward and unambiguous fashion. Stokes and Lomax (2008) is an example. Weick (1995) argues however, that the environment is subjectively perceived and constructed by organisational members as individual acts. Research conducted by Knibbs et al (1987), clearly highlighted how different managers within the same organisation construct significantly different organisational analyses, even though they are all supposedly describing the same external environments. If managers do not notice, or are not concerned by certain environmental events, then they will not be acted upon (Weick, 1995). For Smircich and Stubbart (1985), strategic managers are “playwrights” who create and enact their own environments.

Weick also points out that the rational model assumes a mass of data is collected on the business environment. This is not always the case in practice. One manager in the study spoke for many when he was asked if he completed an environmental analysis. He replied by saying "No, No...I just want to know how the opposition is disposed around me...."

In this study, the business environment was not found to be a fixed objective entity, but embedded in the local rationality of marketing managers worlds. This is a result of the pragmatic acceptance of what is reasonable and achievable, by organisational members. Textbooks regularly fail to capture this complexity and ambiguity relying instead, on a simple organisation\environment dichotomy.

Article of faith: marketing decisions are best made using rational technical tools

An additional key article of the textbook faith is represented by the strategic planning tools. In most marketing textbooks, it seems obligatory for firms to carry out a portfolio analysis, see Brassington and Pettitt 2005pp399-404; Kotler and Armstrong pp39-44). These are ubiquitous in the modern marketing textbook, despite a critical crescendo as to their relevance. Morrison and Wensley (1991) argue it is an approach which 'boxes in' strategic thinking and is an outmoded orthodoxy. Additionally, the Boston matrix is criticised as being too narrow and difficult to work with. Whilst Brown (2001p93) has noted that the 'bloom is going off boxes' matrices are very resilient. For some of the managers in this study, it is clear that decisions are based on an alternative, intuitive, tacit approach, rather than on the use of boxes. At Vincent Duke, a major financial services company, the marketing manager indicated that strategic thinking does not primarily come from the planning tools.

"...most of us really do our marketing thinking by just imagining how we would feel as a customer, and that has given us an awful lot of what we need to know and understand, to move the company on."

There is little evidence that marketing textbooks even acknowledge this approach to decision making let alone discuss it. The case is that intuition and tacit knowledge often developed in local contexts do not sit well with overarching, explicit rationalist frameworks. Robin Cawley, marketing director of the major financial services firm Nelson Universals, in wrestling with the inherent problems of trying to model complex business activity, indicates the importance of the tacit.

"All you are left with is gut feel and this kind of wisdom and experience. There is a place for that because in the absence of any clear direction you have to base it on something; you might as well base it on gut feeling as anything else."

Hackley (2000) in his study of work in an advertising agency, indicated how central tacit knowledge is to marketing decision making. 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. He contends that high level practical knowledge in this area is tacit. He goes on to point out that 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. These implicit features of marketing knowledge are systematically ignored in

textbooks, where the emphasis is still put on the four Ps of the marketing mix as frameworks for understanding (for example Brassington and Pettitt 2005). This is despite concerted argument which suggests the concept is increasingly moribund (Gronross 1994; Brownlie and Saren 1992).

The notion of social reality as a constellation of pluralities, suggests that knowledge is often personal and subjective. A consequence of this is that each marketing manager here has a reservoir of wisdom which is embedded within the context of their own organisation. This may not be able to be codified into one overarching marketing reality, but into many. This is a point most textbooks ignore. Trevor Cole of Lewis Stuart, which manufactures small industrial machines, explains why he does not use the analytical marketing tools. Trevor was asked if he used tools like the Boston matrix to help plan and execute marketing strategy.

" No, in practice we probably don't. We use more initiative, conversations. We do with the AVV external overseas distributors...we say, what do you actually think about your market currently? How do you see it? Forecast what you are going to order from us, and in fact we do use their forecast within our manufacturing build programmes."

For Brown (2001), the marketing concept itself is inherently spiritual. It stresses becoming over being, an unending quest for customer orientation and the pursuit of general theories. This priestly view of marketing has its attendant rites and rituals, part of which is its analytical tools. As Kent (1998p139) points out, current marketing knowledge is"Embedded in faith - faith in the efficacy of its preaching; faith in the catechisms of its teachings; faith in the textbooks of marketing dogma." Matrices are inherently mystical squares and boxes; they are chimera, articles of faith that appear in textbooks, but not in the life worlds of the marketing managers in this study.

Article of faith: marketing is mainly about managing the four Ps

Many textbooks give the strong impression that marketing is principally about managing the four Ps, see for example Stokes and Lomax (2008). In Dibb et al (2006), pages 293 through to 713 deal almost exclusively with the manipulation of the marketing mix. In contrast, managers in the study often referred to the inadequacy of a four Ps approach. At Stirling Publisher, Jason Hobart, the marketing director, points 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 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."

It can probably be argued that in fact marketing is more about the management of relationships. Gummesson (2002) is critical of the way relationships and networks are dealt with in marketing textbooks. He argues that the area has still not made any substantial impact, with relationship marketing often appearing as an adjunct chapter at the end. This may be overstating the case. None of the following have a whole chapter devoted to relationship marketing; Brassington and Pettitt (2005), Dibb and Simkin et al (2006), Jobber (2007), Stokes and Lomax (2008). Given Gummesson's point that business is a primarily a network of relationships, the reductionist logic inherent in the

marketing textbook is flawed. For Gilmore et al. (2001), networks are an important way in which marketing decisions are made. Their study indicates that SME marketing decision making is built around spontaneity, reactivity, informality and looseness. As a result of the interviews carried out with the managers of this study, there is no reason to suggest that networks are not a major way in which marketing decisions are made in all types of businesses, not just small ones.

The case is that the conventional strategic planning models of the textbooks emphasise a simple systemic approach. This largely ignores context as Hills et al (2008) study shows. They identify small business 'entrepreneurial' marketers, where business is principally about a social, negotiated order rather than the simple systemic truths of marketing textbooks. As Brown (2008) notes, structure dominates agency in most mainstream marketing books. The latter do not capture the complex nature of lived reality and the strategy-making process which exists within the network approach to marketing (Wensley 1995; Moller and Halinen 2000). Here, the emphasis is not on general prescription but, rather, on description and understanding, in an attempt to explain how institutions and individuals interact in inter-firm relationships (Ellis and Meyer, 2001). At Mitre Technics, which is a B2B firm, it is almost impossible just to base marketing on a simple general planning model, as each customer has to be dealt with individually. Gordon Willis indicates that,

"...everything is sold to a different specification to every customer...a lot of long term contracts and you have to write very detailed customer plans and quality plans for a contract...we are currently writing contracts now, that will run for another eight or ten years..."

Arguably, a key relationship within the organisation is the internal market. Although the debate about this area has been present for some considerable time (see (Ahmed and Rafiq 2004; Piercy and Morgan 1994), it has still not yet appeared as a mainstream topic in marketing textbooks, As Robin Cawley, marketing director comments,

"...your own people, who at the end of the day are the make or break of your company, because that is who the customer and the retailer will touch....and if they don't agree with what the company is doing? ...internal marketing is incredibly important, that is counted as almost the thing that most marketing textbooks ignore."

As with relationship marketing generally, none of the textbooks examined gave it a separate chapter. The failure to deal with this topic fully, with its emphasis on people, their often diverse perceptions and motivations at work, means that textbook marketing isolates itself from the interdisciplinary nature of practice. Somehow, magically, employees fit unproblematically into the configurations of the organisations marketing system. This is an assumption strongly questioned in this study, supported in turn by the work of Harris and Ogbonna (1999).

Article of faith: True marketing understanding is about the principles of analysis, planning and control

Another area of significant neglect in the study of marketing decision making in textbooks, which is linked to relationship and network activity, is the role of talk. Marketing textbooks overwhelmingly see the discipline in terms of a straightforward

functionalist model, devoid of subjectivity. As Brownlie and Saren (1997p150) note, marketing is reported in such a way so as to neglect “the broader social processes and practices that are constitutive of organising activity.” Despite the fact that as early as 1973, when Mintzberg showed that management decision making is characterised by verbal interaction, the study of talk still does not occupy the writers of marketing textbooks. As Boden (1994) points out, the main activity of managers in organisations is not planning, but talking. In the study here, talk was found to be a central aspect of marketing decision making. Vaara et al., (2004) note that much existing research into strategy ignores the discursive practices of individuals. King (2003), points out that in organisational theory, the role of text is dominant over that of talking. Hackley (2003), indicates that the enacted complexities of marketing are reduced to the endless reproduction of abstract principles in texts where the process of talk is ignored. Des Arkwright, director of leisure marketing at Newfound City Council, indicates that talk is intrinsic to his work.

“...So an awful lot of talking internally, with various people and an awful lot with partners, potential partners and again I mean last week we had a company come down from Scotland who would like to build facilities, maybe in some of our parks, and there was a lot of talking to them...quite a bit of talking to communities...”

Explicit theories of marketing contained in textbooks, dealing with high level strategic development fail to engage with the notion of the socially mediated nature of knowledge. Decision making is linear, variables can be easily isolated and technical rationality dominates the process of understanding (Cunningham 1999). In contrast, for Weick (1995), the sense that managers make of their world is not rooted in theoretical models, but in reflexivity and the ongoing nature of events, where managers are always in the middle of things. Strategy becomes observed patterns in past decision behaviour and is not a future constructed now, and then subsequently implemented as the analysis, planning and control model suggests. Guy Martin of Media K a marketing and design consultancy goes on to suggest there is a key element of retrospect to decision making.

“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.”

Significantly, what textbooks actually fail to do adequately is to capture the narratives through which marketers make sense of their world. An important body of research in organisations has been carried out, showing the extent of storytelling in organisations (see Boland and Tenkasi 1995; Hopkinson 2003; Skoldberg 1994). The textbooks emphasise normative marketing theory where people appear devoid of their interpretative, narrative based selves. As Patterson and Brown (2005) point out, telling tales is central to successful communication. The problem is that marketing academics seem to have forgotten this important fact when they come to write their textbooks. This study found that managers frequently resorted to stories when recounting their experiences. If managers think in story telling modes why is this not reflected in texts? One of the managers in the study commented on how people go about making meaning in their organisation, using stories

“People think narratively, we do not think in bullet points...what bullet points lack are the broader explanations which people need...in terms of my staff having to

implement plans, people will say ‘I worked for so and so and this is how we did it, can we do something like that here’. People rarely say we must achieve this or that ratio or percentage rate, but people will tell each other stories about retention rates instead.”

Marketing is essentially about good communications and here there is a paradox if we think about the role of the textbook. Brands are built on good stories (Brown 2005). Are textbooks however, helping to develop the marketing storytellers of the future? The reliance in the textbooks on largely untested articles of faith, generalised, unimaginative theories, and a variety of mystic matrices (Brown 2001), is unlikely to provide budding marketers with the facility to provide the consumer with an inspiring vision of a company’s products and services. Textbooks not only fail to reflect reality, but they are also doing a disservice to those about to enter the field. As Brown (2008) shows, many leading marketing practitioners have never formally studied the topic and yet are successful, despite having little familiarity with 4Ps, 7Ss or 3Cs. As yet, few newer marketing textbooks, with some exceptions, (see Blythe 2006; Saren 2006; Palmer 2004), appear to be about attempts to pursue different agendas. The latter book for example, places relationships in much more of a pivotal position than many other established texts, while the first takes a critical perspective on some established aspects of prescriptive theory, through the use of ‘talking points’ throughout the text. Saren’s book represents a radical departure with an emphasis on marketing as a social process, rather than as a set of instrumental management driven processes. In general though, it is clear that most marketing textbooks remain remarkably resilient to change.

CONCLUSION: THE ENDING OF HERESY AND THE CREATION OF A NEW VISION OF MARKETING

In drawing together the findings from the research, a number of key issues emerge. Firstly, marketing was never defined as an abstract principle outside the activity frame of these managers. The study reflects the point made by Hackley (2001p94) that “...I have never heard of a marketing intervention that was that was designed and enacted guided by anything other than local experience...” Another key finding relates to selling. The latter is frequently relegated to a position of lesser importance in general marketing textbooks. In this study, it is seen by managers to be a central feature of their activity. Additionally, the business environment, which is usually subjected to a superfluity of analytical models, is not imbedded in these frameworks, but exists instead in the enacted complexities of managers’ day to day sensemaking experiences. For the marketers of this study, decision making boxes are often viewed as being peripheral, with judgements about marketing being based around the tacit and the intuitive. Allied to this, the basis for a considerable amount of decision making in marketing is relationships and networks, where strategy emerges from talk, interaction and the general flow of discontinuous events. Decisions come from observing patterns in past behaviour and acting on these patterns in a reflective, indexical manner. Internal relationships are also very significant. Marketing success is not based on a simple grasp of planning principles and processes, but on an understanding of how people as subjective actors work and think in the pursuit of often diverse personal objectives. The commitment of employees and their ability to be able to derive a sense of meaning from work is as central to the success of marketing as any rational decision tool. Finally, it is important to note that marketing success is perhaps

predicated on no more than a good story told well, a point missed by most of the standard marketing texts, with their emphasis on rational processes.

Reality is multifaceted and arguably, each marketing situation is unique. How can the richness of this marketing practice be better understood and communicated? It is argued that to understand this complexity, means that marketing scholars should first examine what goes on under the name of marketing in organisations, using an interpretative perspective. The resulting thick descriptions could be the basis of new visions and theories of marketing which are rooted in the lived world of the practitioner and not in abstract theory. Some important implications stem then from examining the local contexts in which marketing operates. This study shows for example, that the marketing manager of Vincent Duke operates relatively successfully a marketing process that does not bear much resemblance to the dominant model. Why then can't the marketing textbook capture, in rich ethnographic detail, the exactitudes of the decision making process he uses and the ensuing practical action? Instead, we have emasculated case studies that demonstrate dubious notions of terse propositional knowledge, which always are linear and technically rational. In marked contrast, the business world is fraught with problems and fails to conform to textbook principles. Kent (1998) calls for the observation of reality to be mediated through a focus on the subjective worlds of participants. The multiple realities of marketing cannot be brought to light using only the rituals and rhetoric used by the priests of marketing's established church. What is required is a different vision of marketing reality. Diversity should be embraced, seen as adding to knowledge, rather than being dismissed as simple heresy.

Managers in this study have provided some insights into their own personal views of marketing theory and practice and these could be further assembled and extended to provide marketing learners with deep contextual information about the management of marketing. As individuals in society we interpret and order our knowledge in different ways (Berger and Luckman 1966), so it is questionable to think that marketing knowledge should be represented any differently. The search for and belief in a general theory of marketing is illusory, when confronted by the reality of marketing managers local experiences and knowledge. Textbooks must try to capture this aspect of reality, if they are to present marketing with integrity. The argument which states the role of textbooks is present sets of handy mnemonics to learners is a tired one. The discipline has to draw much more fully on the interpretative tradition. We are likely as a consequence, to end up with competing theories of what marketing is, based on accounts of practice. This can only add value to the subject both as an academic endeavour and as an applied field. If this complicates marketing, making it more interdisciplinary and demanding for learners, then this is a challenge worth facing. As a result, a new ethnographically informed marketing will be based on the changing common sense practices of social actors and not within a set of reified and dubious articles of faith.

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