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Conceptualizing for managerial relevance in B2B research: a grounded theory approach

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to formulate recommendations for business-to-business (B2B) researchers, with the potential to increase the extent to which B2B research is relevant to managers.

Design/methodology/approach – These recommendations are derived from and inspired by the grounded theory methodology.

Findings – In this article, we argue that conceptualizations which are potentially relevant to managers are those that discover new perspectives, simplify complexity, enable managers to take action and have an instant grab. To accomplish this as researchers, the authors emphasize fostering a beginner's mind, creating umbrella models, increasing the level of abstraction of concepts and finding the core process in data.

Originality/value – In this article, we translate the basic principles within the grounded theory methodology into more general recommendations that can be used by B2B researchers.

Keywords Managers, Business-to-business marketing

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Several researchers have argued that one way to increase managerial relevance in business research is to provide managers with appropriate concepts (Astley and Zammuto, 1992; Jaworski, 2011). In a more recent study on the use of marketing theory, Cornelissen and Lock (2005, p. 175) found that:

[. . .] conceptual use has the greatest currency with practitioners [. . .] and that conceptual devices such as the SWOT-analysis, Product-Life-Cycle, and the marketing mix in particular were used conceptually rather than formal theories or research methods”.

The reason for these findings might be that such conceptual devices offer managers considerable scope and flexibility by which to redefine, select and reinterpret the conceptual models or devices to be used in a variety of circumstances. For example, a comparison of the various ways in which strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analyses have been used in different organizations would probably reveal numerous differences, both in application and in the results rendered. Nevertheless, such analyses have certainly assisted managers in their “thoughts and actions”, thereby providing them with a sort of conceptual “anchor” that assists them in the ongoing process of making sense of events that are taking place within their organization. As Ohmann stated almost 60 years ago (1955, p. 34):

Man is searching for anchors outside himself. He runs wearily to the periphery of the spider web of his own reason and logic and looks for “skyhooks” – for an abiding faith around which life's experiences can be integrated and given meaning.

In other words, conceptual devices can be used as flexible linguistic tools, both to create understanding and to facilitate action. As Astley and Zammuto (1992, p. 453) argued, “conceptual utilization of organization science concepts implies that managers use their inside knowledge of an organizational setting to interpret and apply general theoretical ideas”. In that sense, managerial language serves as a lens for structuring what is fundamentally unstructured, thereby providing “the psychological confidence required for the exploration of new courses of action” (Astley and Zammuto, 1992, p. 452).

Similarly, Jaworski (2011) argued that managers can obtain influential knowledge from concepts and interrelationships between concepts, especially those concepts that “provide a broad orientation or an umbrella perspective” (Jaworski, 2011, p. 218). Such an umbrella perspective helps managers because it is a way of thinking “broadly about a topic” (Jaworski, 2011, p. 218).

The grounded theory methodology aims to produce conceptualizations that are relevant to the actors involved. Inspired by this particular methodology, we will, in this article, introduce a few core aspects that are of importance for conceptualization in relation to the problem of managerial relevance in business-to-business (B2B) marketing in general. These aspects are based on our interpretation of research by Glaser and Strauss (1967), as well as Glaser's later works

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(1998, 2001), and our experience from conducting research using the grounded theory methodology.

Thus, we argue that a conceptualization that is relevant to managers should:

- discover (Glaser and Strauss, 1967);
- simplify and make complexity manageable (Glaser, 1998);
- enable (Glaser, 1998); and
- grab (Glaser, 1998, 2001).

Based on these core aspects of the grounded theory methodology, the aim of this article is to formulate recommendations for B2B researchers to produce managerially relevant conceptualizations.

These recommendations will be exemplified via the grounded theory methodology and a study presented by Åge (2011) called “Business manoeuvring – a model of complex B2B selling processes”, which, since its publication, has been proven to be relevant to Swedish managers in several organizations. For a detailed description on its use, see the article “How and why managers use conceptual devices in B2B research” (Åge 2014).

Conceptualizing

MacInnis (2011) argued that conceptualization involves “seeing” or “understanding” something abstract, in one’s mind, and that conceptual thinking is the understanding of a situation or problem as an abstraction of experienced patterns or connections. MacInnis claimed that this way of thinking is central to our understanding of our world. The concepts involved can be anything from images to real, metaphorical, mathematical or verbal representations of ideas regarding the abstracted patterns as we continually construct our symbolic universes via objectification with concepts, and take these universes for granted to varying degrees. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), once these symbolic universes are legitimized, they act as “machineries of universe-maintenance” (p. 105). They work as a kind of hypothesis that will guide actions until the hypothesis is discarded, when the social interpretation starts to favor another scheme of concepts (Hollis, 1994).

The origin and degree of impact of concepts has long been debated. For example, the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis suggests that our understanding of the world is determined by the linguistic structure in our minds (Sapir, 1929). Similarly, claims have been made about universals of thought, such as categories and concepts that do not change at all and serve as an indispensable core for the conceptual equipment (Strawson, 1959). Such views of an absolute language were challenged by the so-called “linguistic turn” during the 20th century in favor of destabilized language (Kristensson Uggla, 2002). For example, Gadamer (1989) observed that all living languages struggle to harmonize what is universal with the pragmatic meaning of language. Nowadays, most social scientists agree that concepts are relativistic and cannot perfectly represent the social world because of its constant flux and the changes in language itself. “Language is used to persuade, enjoy, engage, discipline, criticize, express feelings, clarify, unite, do identity work, and so on” (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000, p. 142).

In other words, conceptualization is a question of who is naming the phenomena, the context within which these phenomena are constructed, how well founded they are and the extent to which they are applicable in other contexts. In business environments, practitioners, particularly management, have a direct relation to the phenomena in question. Consultants and researchers can also be familiar with the processes, and each group, with their different affinities, can have divergent perspectives on the phenomena, resulting in various conceptualizations. In this way, conceptualization of the same phenomena can differ in terms of empirical grounding and theoretical perspective. The concepts emanating from practitioners (*in vivo* concepts) are often based on repeated experiences, whereas researchers’ concepts (*in vitro* concepts) are more abstract and theoretical (Glaser, 1978).

Conceptualizations have the potential to provide managers with flexible and useful tools that can be used in different settings; at the same time, they can also exclude dimensions that might be relevant. For example, the four P’s framework excludes things such as networking and relationships in its simplification of marketing activities.

However, no concept can include all possible aspects of B2B marketing activities. Such an all-encompassing concept would be likely to end up being extremely abstract ideas that aim for grand generalization but convey little relevance to managers in their attempts to include a great variety of aspects.

At other times, conceptualizations include dimensions that are not relevant. This can happen when a researcher borrows concepts from other areas to be used by managers. When terms are stretched beyond the limits of the field to which they are originally applied, a concept-transcending mode of knowledge is encountered (Strauss, 2013). However, this process involves a risk that those concepts will be missing the precision required to provide maximum relevance to managers. For example, consider the expression “in this company we are a family”: this may refer to a real family-owned and -driven company; but in other contexts, it becomes clear that though there is some resemblance between a company and a family, there are also several dimensions that are missing in one or the other. Obviously, it is difficult to compare or aggregate meanings emerging in different contexts (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000).

Our understanding of conceptualization, which is at the core of the scientific enterprise and of management practice, discussed briefly above and used in this paper, is that language, concepts and categorizations to a large extent determine our perception of, and actions in, the world. However, concepts are not absolutely given in structures; hence, re-interpretation and re-conceptualization are necessary to make a better fit in a changing social world. This includes the invention of new concepts for under- or even un-conceptualized phenomena. In marketing research, there are abundant conceptualizations, but few descriptions regarding how these came about, except for quantitative models (Ulaga and Eggert, 2006; Sirdeshmukh *et al.*, 2002). Cavusgil *et al.* (2005) have criticized these attempts, and state a desire to see a richer formulation of performance constructs, as well as an improved formulation and operationalization of intangible constructs. However, MacInnis (2011) recently

presented a framework for conceptualization in marketing based on a review of articles over the past 25 years. She emphasized the value of conceptualization in marketing, and highlighted the need for training in conceptual skills development, including developing and sustaining a “beginner’s mind”, that is, to make efforts to circumvent our own presumptions.

Conceptualizations produced within grounded theory methodology are intended to be relevant and useful to the actors involved. A core idea in this methodology is that the researcher starts with an attitude of openness that seeks to ensure that the “the emerging of concepts never fails” (Glaser, 1978, p. 44). Thus, according to Glaser (1978), data collection in grounded theory methodology begins with a “sociological perspective [of a] general problem area [rather than a] preconceived conceptual framework” (p. 44). The next step involves the generation of various categories via the “constant comparison” of data through a procedure known as “open coding” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978). According to this procedure, which permeates the whole research process, “incidents are compared to incidents [and then] concepts to more incidents” (Glaser, 1978, p. 62) to generate more conceptual properties. Finally, concepts are compared to concepts to integrate the theory.

The present authors have extensive experience in this particular methodology, and understand the ways in which its output can be relevant to managers (Åge, 2011; Gustavsson, 2007). Based on this experience, the aim of this article is to formulate recommendations for B2B researchers to produce managerially relevant conceptualizations.

The original study by Åge (2011) argued that linear models fail to recognize that several dimensions coexist simultaneously in contemporary selling processes. In contrast, the proposed model recognizes the concurrent dimensions of:

- formality and organizational issues (captured in the category of “business standardization”);
- collaboration at the organizational level (represented by the category of “business fraternization”);
- relationships at the personal level (captured in the category of “personalization”); and
- concern about costs and risks (represented by the category of “probationary business rationalization”).

Moreover, the judicious management of these four dimensions (captured in the core category of “business maneuvering”) is what actually characterizes the “real-life” management of contemporary B2B selling processes.

Discover

The naming of unseen, intuitive or abstract phenomena can contribute to new understandings of the social world, or “seeing” it a new and abstract way, thereby transcending previous relations and properties. This transcendence within the conceptualization process provides an opportunity by which to discover new ways of perceiving old problems or perceive what actions within a business, thereby releasing a host of opportunities.

For example, in Åge’s study (2011), business conduct was described as a “business manoeuvring process” in which seemingly opposing dimensions are managed with dexterity

and skill. In a way, this was a new perspective on the process of selling. Thus, making business deals was not described as a linear and simple process; instead, it was viewed as a dynamic and non-sequential one. A manager in a global information technology (IT) firm commented on this topic:

Models describing business projects [have] always been linear with certain steps [. . .] one followed by another [. . .] Everyone involved know[s] that this is not the way things are [. . .] they are more dynamic and sometimes chaotic [. . .] the business manoeuvring model mirrors what it actually is about [. . .] you have to manoeuvre all these things simultaneously [. . .] bit by bit, in a different way each time [. . .].

The degree to which the conceptualizations succeed to discover differs depending on the conceptual skills they entail and the facilitating tools that enable them (MacInnis, 2011). This process has been described as a “conceptual journey” in cognitive terms (Von Krogh and Roos, 1995), where entering a different cognitive domain requires one to be aware that there is a different domain, to find it meaningful and to dare to immerse oneself in it.

We have great conceptual power over our cognitive capabilities to make the world manageable (this aspect is discussed further below); at the same time, this power is a conservative force with a tendency for us to use familiar concepts that might not be appropriate for the phenomenon or domain that we are communicating. We can ask why McCarthy’s four Ps are still in vogue in most marketing fields, despite their weak applicability in many areas, including service marketing and B2B. Lindh (2011) found that the traditional marketing view of the consumer and the enterprise or its offering as being independent does not fit the marketing of cultural experiences (in Lindh’s case, art museums). Instead, Lindh developed a theory that uses the concept of “reciprocal engagement” to emphasize the creating and mediating experiences of the enterprise, and its offers in a way that has meaning to others. As the example of Lindh’s theory of reciprocal engagement shows, this theory may facilitate entirely new ways in which to market the cultural experience, instead of traditionally marketing it in terms of segmentation, and use price, place and promotion to reach sufficient numbers of consumers.

Beginner’s mind

So, how can researchers in the field of B2B marketing discover concepts that are relevant for managers? One way is to cultivate what MacInnis (2011) described as “a beginner’s mind”. Such a mindset focuses on identifying relevant patterns in the area of study in a way that does not primarily force what is found in the empirical field into existing theoretical frameworks. In other words, a beginner’s mind is a way to ensure that we, as researchers, do not lose contact with the empirical domain. As MacInnis (2011) noted, the way that research is commonly conducted at universities does not support a beginner’s mind, as most researchers are trained in a specific field of interest, such as “network theory”, relationship marketing” or “service-dominant logic”. Of course, reviewing the literature is an important part of any research endeavor, but it entails a risk that things will only be understood in terms of established ideas.

The grounded theory approach is an inductive methodology that focuses on discovering patterns in the empirical field. One of the cornerstones of this process is the above-mentioned

“tabula rasa”, which is a way to cultivate a beginner’s mind. Many researchers will dispute the possibility of having such a “blank mind”; this view is then used as an excuse to neglect the discovery and immersion aspects of the research process, and instead fully perpetuate the theoretical perspectives present in the extant literature.

Instead, we argue here that the key is to be aware of what is “known”, and also the possibilities of discovering something that is conceptually new. This balance, which is quite common and is referred to within the grounded theory approach as “theoretical sensitivity” (Glaser, 1978), means that researchers need an understanding that facilitates the conceptual ability without overshadowing the discovery aspect of the research endeavor.

Therefore, to produce managerially relevant concepts in B2B marketing, we make the following recommendation to B2B researchers:

R1. *To facilitate the discovery of relevant patterns, make conscious efforts to cultivate a beginner’s mind and facilitate immersion into the practical field.*

Another way of ensuring that researchers boost their conceptual “discovery ability” and their ability to provide findings that are relevant to managers is to be open with regard to the main problems and questions in their research project. It might sometimes be a good idea to start collecting data at an early stage, without having specified every dimension in terms of the extant literature, thereby making a conscious effort to facilitate immersion into the relevant dimensions of the manager’s world. Therefore:

R2. *To discover something new, try to have openness in the initial stages of the research project and start collecting data at an early stage in the research process.*

Simplify

The immense complexity in relations and their properties must be reduced through conceptualization for the topic to be manageable. Such condensation is often essential to make conceptualizations relevant to managers, especially in a complex context such as a B2B market.

To exemplify, a manager in a veterinary firm described how she used the “business manoeuvring” model (Åge, 2014):

When I presented what I wanted us to do for the management team, I used the business manoeuvring model since it simplified what otherwise would have seemed almost impossible. Becoming a business organization is a huge step to undertake when you are a veterinarian whose focus is on the well-being of animals.

She continued:

When the management team saw my presentation of the four categories, they all thought it was doable. Hey, how hard can it be? It’s just four principles that we have to manage in terms of becoming a real business organization!

Of course, the simplification process that this implies can comprise different qualities. We all try to simplify situations in our daily lives, often through metaphors or transferred means of expression; that is, concepts used to convey something similar to what they really signify. A common example is to describe stiff market competition using the phrase “it’s a jungle out there”. Such a statement or conceptualization may

make a manager feel that he or she knows what is occurring in the market. In other words, this metaphor simplifies the myriad activities encountered by the manager, which simplifies the complexities of the process of competition, and makes it manageable in some way for the actors involved. However, while it might be a simplification to say “it’s a jungle out there”, there are, of course, several aspects of a jungle that are definitively not present in a competitive market. In other words, despite this metaphor’s ability to simplify something that is immensely complex, it lacks precision, and therefore relevance.

Managers often experience complex situations that require simplification that is more relevant and well-founded in the problem area. In such cases, the challenge is to find the core of the problem area at a level that is sufficiently abstract to simplify complexity and make it manageable.

For example, Malshe and Sohi (2009) identified the core of the highly complex field of how sales are integrated into the formulation of marketing strategy as a process based on a theoretical framework that consists of three stages – groundwork, transfer and follow-up – which makes the process manageable by providing abstracted concepts, and a larger picture of the processes involved in the strategy-making. Another example is Lowe’s (1998) study of bank mergers, in which the core category of *default remodeling* describes how relationships were redesigned by supporting, terminating and neglecting them.

This call to find such core processes that contribute to a larger picture of a phenomena that is highly complex is in line with Jaworski’s (2011) argument that concepts and interrelationships between concepts, especially those “that provide a broad orientation or an umbrella perspective” (Jaworski, 2011, p. 218), can have influential knowledge for managers. Such an umbrella perspective helps managers by being a way of thinking “broadly about a topic” (Jaworski, 2011, p. 218).

Turning to the grounded theory methodology, the aim is to construct larger pictures that are firmly based on data. In this methodology, the quest for core processes is described as finding the “basic social process” that can explain the actors’ “main concern”. Such a basic social process is the cornerstone of most grounded theory studies. According to Glaser (1978), this basic social process consists of two or more stages, which means that it can be characterized as “processural” (p. 101). According to Glaser (1978, p. 101), a basic social process has several other properties, including:

- being pervasive (that is, it is a fundamental process that continues over time “irrespective of the conditional variation of place”); and
- having full variability (it can be found in different places in different forms).

Apart from Lowe’s (1998) study of mergers, in which the core category/basic social process was *default remodeling*, other examples are *opportunizing* in Christiansen’s (2005) study of business management, and *cultivating* in Bigus’ (1972) study of milkmen. These core categories or basic social processes are the centerpieces of a grounded theory study, and bind the other categories together in the sense that they are related to all other categories.

Therefore, an additional recommendation for B2B researchers is provided as follows:

- R3. *To make complexity manageable, focus on creating an umbrella perspective on your problem area, which provides managers with a broader view.*

As mentioned above, one way of accomplishing this larger picture is to find the core process in the data. One way of finding this process is to simply look for it in the data. Following the more detailed guidelines within the grounded theory approach, this is accomplished by “knocking on the data” and asking the following questions: What is actually happening in the data? What social process is present? Asking such questions will hopefully enable the researcher to find the larger picture, the core process, which can then provide the general pattern to which other concepts can be connected. Finding this core process provides the most important building block in our umbrella theory.

Therefore:

- R4. *To find the core process when looking through your data, ask, “What is actually going on here?” or “What is the social process in this material?”*

Enable

Providing concepts for intuitive and inexplicable phenomena makes them manageable, and the conceptualization opens up many new possibilities. One of grounded theory’s quality criteria is that the conceptualization should fit and be relevant to the context it emerged from (Glaser, 1992). Thus, conceptualization can provide managers with an understanding and insights which then form the basis from which to initiate proper action and embrace change. In this sense, concepts have the ability to enable managers to act even in the midst of chaotic events and processes in flux.

A manager in a global IT company described the way in which the “business manoeuvring model” facilitates action (Åge, 2014):

Through the business manoeuvring model, we had four principles that simplified all critical components in a complex outsourcing project. That simplicity made it easier for all of us to learn, communicate, and prepare for coming events [. . .]. We could say, do we have the right personnel on board in this project to tackle personalization effectively? Or how do we establish business fraternization with this customer?

Several researchers have argued that such manager-relevant conceptual devices are flexible, in the sense that they have an “openness of meaning” (Cornelissen and Lock, 2005; Ohmann, 1955; Astley and Zammuto, 1992; Jaworski, 2011; Daft and Wiginton, 1979). This openness of meaning implies that these devices are useful under different circumstances and in different ways, which provides:

great latitude to practitioners in selecting, redefining, altering and combining and generally reinterpreting substantive theory and the declarative knowledge it contains to fit a wide variety of circumstances and purposes (Cornelissen and Lock, 2005, p. 175).

This means that the devices are sufficiently abstract, and can, therefore, be subjected to an interpretation process in which they are adopted and adapted to the specific circumstances of that particular situation.

As described by Åge (2014), the managers actively translated this model to situation-specific problems and challenges in a creative and

action-oriented manner. In other words, this “business manoeuvring” model described a complex sales process, but its abstractness made it possible for the various managers to translate it to their specific challenges. The important point in this adoption process was that the managers were not simply passively consuming this piece of research; instead, they were actively adopting it to their unique challenges. In other words, rather than simply being consumers of research, they were on “equal footing” with the researcher, and in facing the research output, they seemed to ask the question: “How can I use this research to solve my current problems?”

When analyzing the reasons and moderators for this type of active and creative use, it became clear that it was important for the model to be abstract enough to allow such creative interpretations (Åge, 2014). The “business manoeuvring” model was not expressed on a data level, but instead on a higher level of abstraction. To exemplify, the managers in these organizations all interpreted the term “business manoeuvring” differently. For example, for the manager in the IT company, the term meant the delicate management of an outsourcing project. For the managers in the sales consultancy firm, the term denoted all the processes that have to be in place to make an organization effective. Finally, for the managers in the veterinary firm, the term described the different dimensions that have to be managed in a business-driven organization.

In the grounded theory methodology, this aspect of abstractness that makes a concept work under different circumstances is one of the most important characteristics of useful concepts. In this methodology, such abstractness contrasts with detailed descriptions that function at a data level (that is, restricted to a specific context), as grounded theory strives for a more abstracted and general level in its conceptualization.

The key to creating such abstract conceptualizations is finding a “higher level of perspective” (Glaser, 1998). This means finding the core process (R4) and then expressing it at a high level of abstraction. These two aspects ensure that we have a concept that works not only in the context from which it was derived, but in other situations as well. This leads to our next recommendation:

- R5. *To produce concepts that enable managerial actions, try to create concepts that are not on a data level, but on a higher level of abstraction.*

Creating concepts on a higher level of abstraction makes it possible for managers to adapt them to their specific challenges. Another way of ensuring that conceptualizations help managers in their daily endeavors is for them to be processual in their character, rather than static. This means that they describe processes instead of static and stable events. One way of depicting processes is by using *gerunds* or *gerundives*, that is, verbal nouns with an *-ing* suffix, which denote a “non-specific, generic reference to encode the name of a type or class of process” (Heyvaert, 2008, p. 39). These aspects are important because when a concept is expressed as a process rather than as something static (that is, when a gerund is used to describe it), it is more likely to be able to lend itself to a wide range of situations in which this process is present; the concept has no beginning or ending in time. For example, the noun *organization* denotes an intangible, static entity containing, for instance, people, buildings and machines, while the gerund *organizing* denotes the processes

between the people in the organization and its environment. In relation to bank mergers, the aforementioned study by Lowe (1998) identified that the core process of the dominant company in the merger, called *default remodeling*, molded staff and customers of the subordinate bank into the dominant company's culture. This process is recognized in many other fusions, not just among banks. Therefore:

R6. *To facilitate the broad use of your concepts, with the potential to enable managerial action, try to use gerunds when denoting a core process in the data.*

Grab

Ideally, concepts should have an instant grab in that sense that they empower managers via their formulation and gives managers a vocabulary for unexpressed and/or intuitive understanding, or a new perspective of a phenomenon or process. In other words, concepts should provide an understanding of what is going on in the field in a way that gives the manager a feeling of power from which to act and embrace change.

Åge's (2011) concept of "business manoeuvring" had such grab because it was adopted, often instantly, by managers when they heard it. For example, the manager of a global IT firm commented:

I have been doing business all my life, but I have never understood what I'm actually doing [. . .] for the first time I now know what I'm good at [. . .] I'm a business manoeuvrer.

He continued:

The term business manoeuvring is spreading in our organization, I can tell you [. . .] even managers you have not met are discussing how deals are to be manoeuvred this way or that way.

However, producing concepts that empower managers is not just a single activity carried out at the end of the research process. Rather, empowering concepts are produced by identifying highly relevant patterns in data and expressing them properly. Thus, empowering concepts with instant grab actually results from the other recommendations put forward above; concepts can be immensely powerful in that they give a new perspective on what goes on in the firm. In other words, these concepts are abstract of time, place and people and can go on forever as an applied way of seeing things (Glaser, 2001).

To a large extent, creating concepts that have grab and are empowering to managers can be regarded as the "reward" of having conducted effective conceptualization from the beginning. However, one aspect must be added at this point: in any grounded theory study in which such empowering concepts with instant grab are found, the researcher can verify that finding them is a timely process. It is difficult to name your process correctly during the first effort; instead, the process is characterized by trial and error and constant efforts to rename the core process, until the actors within the study confirm that the concept has the desired instant grab. This leads to our final recommendations:

R7. *To ensure instant grab, reformulate your conceptualization to ensure that it actually depicts the ongoing core processes in a way that gives a new perspective and describes what is actually going on.*

R8. *In this process, seek feedback from managers about your conceptualizations.*

Discussion

In this article, we have formulated important recommendations to B2B researchers to produce conceptualizations that have managerial relevance. The recommendations draw both on the grounded theory methodology and our experience of what constitutes conceptualizations that managers have found relevant.

As the basis for relevant conceptualizations, we stress the importance of having initial openness and fostering "a beginners mind". By ensuring such openness in the initial stages of a research project, we have better chances to become immersed within the practical field, and to discover important patterns in data. This implies that we might consider going out to collect data at an early stage of the research process, without having specified every dimension in terms of the existing literature. Also, we might consider being flexible with regard to the schedule of questions we plan to put forward when we encounter managers. Sometimes, open and broad questions posed early in a research process can facilitate the discovery of relevant dimensions.

We also emphasize the importance of finding the core of a phenomenon. In the grounded theory methodology, such core process describes the basic social process in data, which is often the centerpiece of the theory produced. This core process has the ability to both depict the main concerns of managers, and to provide an "umbrella perspective" and a broad orientation that can assist managers in their daily endeavors. The first step for researchers toward finding this core phenomenon is to actually look for it in data.

Once we have succeeded in finding the relevant core process from our data, the next challenge is to formulate this process in a way that is abstract enough to facilitate its broad use by managers. Via a high level of abstractedness in our conceptualizations, we can ensure that managers from different organizations can adopt and translate our conceptualizations with regard to the specific challenges they are facing at the time. To depict our core process as a process, gerunds can also contribute to the broad use of our conceptualizations in different contexts.

It is important to note that his final stage in the conceptualization process can be quite a timely one. What was initially seen as an appropriate conceptualization might later on be regarded as only the "first attempt" to formulate something that actually empowers managers and has an "instant grab". Often, in this process, feedback from managers is required to stay on track and to formulate concepts that actually are relevant.

The recommendations proposed in this paper have implications regarding the ways in which we look at our relationships with managers. As this article has shown, our perspective on managers' use of research does not suggest that researchers are the producers of research while managers are the passive consumers; instead, we have emphasized that managers can adapt our research in an action-oriented and creative way with regard to their specific challenges. This perspective implies that researchers and managers are on "equal footing", and that we as researchers are collaborating with managers to produce our research. From this perspective, our research is "translated" by managers to solve their problems. This also implies that we as researchers can obtain valuable input regarding our own research and the ways in which it can be utilized by managers.

In other words, if we as researchers succeed in our efforts to produce managerially relevant research, we must still wait to see how our research is developed in the hands of managers. Managers from various organizations may perceive and use our research in different ways. Some of the unforeseen uses can not only be exciting and stimulating for us as researchers but can also provide valuable input regarding future research areas and projects. Therefore, when we think that our research endeavor has finished, it has really only just begun.

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