Making Connections: Linking Marketing Knowledge
and Culture to Entrepreneurial Marketing

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Abstract: Innovation is the lifeblood of entrepreneurship. Innovation, as a construct linking novelty and creativity and the ability to learn, is the key differentiator between entrepreneurial marketing and mainstream marketing. How can this mix be enabled? is a central question for entrepreneurial marketing as a discipline, or sub-discipline. This paper addresses the connections to be made between creating marketing knowledge and using it. To learn there needs to be shared meaning and these meanings have to be shared within and across organisations and their customers. These patterns of meanings therefore have to cross cultures. We propose a couple of conceptual models that link dynamic culture creation with learning, with external market information and signals. We ask the following questions: How can this be useful in enabling innovation? How might these issues be relevant to marketing entrepreneurship? In sum, how in product and service innovation it is possible to discern and develop patterns of meaning between the firm and its network of stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly the firm is seen as a social community, whose central function is the transfer of knowledge (Hampden-Turner, 1999, Kogut & Zander, 1993), or as a series of re-negotiated contracts (Kay, 1995), where managers, and therefore, marketers, are less rational planners and more ‘symbolic actors, whose primary function is to develop desirable patterns of meaning’ (Starkey, 1998, p.125). The marketing question is how desirable patterns of meaning can be understood and conveyed cross-culturally, both within the firm and to a range of stakeholders. In other words, there is a need for understanding to transcend cultural borders in terms of staff, suppliers and customers. This would appear to be the case regardless of size of firm. Indeed a smaller firm may be able to pay heed to this more easily. An entrepreneurial firm needs to continue to develop these patterns of meaning in order to continue to innovate. The flexibility required for success in start-up situations may be linked to the shared mindset required for successful learning. This need highlights the value of nurturing any latent capacity for learning and those skills that enable and motivate learning, in order to develop shared understandings of all the cultures crossed. Western firms often miss the pivotal place of this ability to learn. For Hamel, Doz and Prahalad (1989) lament that where:

the Japanese have generally learnt more than their UK or US partners, this is not due to oriental deviousness, but to occidental indolence. The key to competing through collaboration is to have the mindset to learn.

(p.147)
In creating marketing knowledge, this means that it must interact overtly with issues to do with culture. The marketing function not only acts as an interface between the organisation and its outside world, but it is a necessary part of the sense-making process of any firm, even the small, entrepreneurial firm which may not find mainstream marketing very congenial. Entrepreneurial marketing nevertheless continues to have another focus: that of retaining customers. Therefore, a key marketing process becomes the development of business relationships (Gummesson, 1997). Indeed, Styles and Ambler (1994) produced a model including relationships and processes of firm-level knowledge management in the export process (see Exhibit 1). The order of importance attributed by them to this ‘relational paradigm’ (p.28) can be seen from their comment that it ‘asserts that relationships and experience are primary and supplemented by objective data and analysis, rather than the reverse’ (p.29).

**Exhibit 1: Internal Factors Contributing to Export Performance** (Adapted from Styles & Ambler, 1994 p.42)

Once we have identified these key issues such as relational management, learning and meaning creation and management we have the heart of the innovative process under scrutiny. In this paper we take a closer look at three areas in particular:

- the dynamism of organizational culture;
- the creation of patterns of meaning;
- the process of sharing values.

Having looked at each of these in some detail, we then integrate them in the constructs of sensing, and sense-making and link them back to the area highlighted in this introduction:
learning. We reflect on a researchable framework for these dynamic marketing processes using the market sensing and learning processes discussed by Day (2002). The paper finishes by considering a suitable (in terms of fitting the areas for closer scrutiny and of fitting the acknowledged method of learning of the smaller business, or entrepreneurial business manager) method of research – action research or learning by doing. We conclude by considering how all this might apply to furthering understanding and practice in marketing entrepreneurship.

The Dynamism of Culture

When discussing the concept of organisational culture, researchers from the marketing discipline tend, seeking always to define parsimoniously, to be reductionist: the core of culture has been exposed as (reduced to) a question of attitudes (Deshpande & Webster, 1989). ‘Shared values’ is the only element of culture readily referred to by marketers (Hoffman & Bateson, 1997; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman, 1988). Yet this definition of culture is unduly narrow. For example, when discussing the need for a culture to nurture a marketing-orientation, marketing culture is reduced to 34 items across six elements (Webster, 1993). It is (just) one of fifteen points to be managed to create the new marketing concept (Webster, 1994). Dibb and Simkin (2000, p.494) give yet another example: ‘in order to achieve this internal cohesiveness, Reynoso and Moores (1996) proposed six steps’. Simplicity and clarity are virtues, (Lings & Brooks, 1998; McDonald, 1992; Dibb & Simkin, 2000) but it is a thin line dividing these from the superficial (Harris & Ogbonna, 1999). In these ways, culture is increasingly acknowledged by marketers, but in too reductionist a way to be wholly (and holistically) accurate and too static, in the interests, admittedly, of being measurable, and therefore researchable.

A model of culture which is inclusive and dynamic was needed, to add to marketing knowledge processes, and this insight is captured in the conceptual model at the heart of this paper (Exhibit 2), which overtly builds on Hatch’s, 1993 model of dynamism in culture. The foundations in defining culture were laid by Schein. (1984) and before that, Geerz (1973) who provided an all-embracing definition:

Believing with Max Weber, that man in an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one, in search of meaning

(p.5)

Hatch's model includes symbols and shared interpretations of basic assumptions, which, together with shared values, add up to the processes of culture. These processes are dynamic and are better conceptualised as continuously re-affirming culture. The capacity to re-negotiate and re-affirm these values in a reflexive manner provides the key to successful management of internationalising marketing processes. This has moved us far forward from the simple, static understanding of culture we previously discussed. Verbs are used to encapsulate this, c.f. Exhibit 2 below. In the model values are realised and manifested in the act of articulating and as events occur.

Espoused values may just be the more surface expression of the thought-life, which is complex and interrelated, as the Hatch model demonstrates. This has not yet been widely recognized in
mainstream or in relationship marketing. Marketers have mostly taken a personality/values lifestyle approach, which permits reductive lists of values to be administered to research objects (Reynolds & Jolly, 1980). Sometimes value systems have been constructed in recognition of the role of prioritizing conflicting values (c.f. Kamakura & Novak, 1992; Rokeach, 1973). Yet although this is more complex and thus more realistic, this approach shares the listing of values presupposition that values are found in things, rather than in consumers’ heads (Holt, 1997) and sits uneasily with postmodern consumers’ articulation of personal creation of meaning (Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

**Exhibit 2: The Cultural Dynamics Model** (Adapted from Hatch, 1993)

![Cultural Dynamics Model](image)

**Culture and the Creation of Meaning**

A number of texts discussing values do so from the perspective of local culture and the spread of values in a local culture to a wider audience (of consumers). Ray (1998) writes of rural communities regenerating themselves by creating a locally specific territory that has a set of cultural resources that it exploits. This production side of the equation he calls ‘the territory’ (p.4), but of interest to this paper, there is the balancing side; there is a consumer of this cultural product or even experience (Roberts & Micken, 1996) to be considered.

This culturally constituted world ‘is the world of everyday experiences in which the phenomenal world presents itself to the individual’s senses fully shaped and constituted by the beliefs and assumptions of his/her culture’ (McCracken, 1986 p.72). Yet this meaning is never fixed – rather it is fluid. McCracken discusses the somewhat impersonal process of flux of location of meaning (see Exhibit 3); via both designed advertising and more spontaneous fashion trends meaning is transferred to goods. The owners then, via the rituals listed below transfer intangible
meanings to themselves in their own identity creation and legitimisation in the act of consumption. In this study we apply this process to the more personal world of the smaller business. Can persons also, in a designed manner, and perhaps more spontaneously, like fashion, be instruments of meaning transfer? And, more than that, can persons create personal identity which ‘does not reflect a stable set of essential features, but is negotiated in a dynamic field of social relations’ (Thompson & Haytko, 1997 p.21)? McCracken sees goods as ‘both the creations and the creators of the culturally constituted world’ (p.74). In a marketing paper it is of course relevant to add dynamism to the very definition of goods, terming them instead, offerings. The offering includes the intangible service and image of the good and also extremely intangible benefits, such as the sharing of values. So, goods are a means for sharing values, as well as value. But from where does this meaning originate? And how fixed or univocal and passive is that which is being modeled? Bessière asks an important question for this paper, once we transfer ‘heritage’ to our concern with values in smaller businesses: ‘With what criteria and values will the social group or actors create and re-create heritage?’ (p.27).

**Exhibit 3: Movement of Meaning** (McCracken, 1986 p.72)

An answer is provided by Holt (1997) when theorizing poststructuralist lifestyles is that the criteria and values are drawn from the particular social setting and context.

If consumption patterns are organized by cultural frameworks constituted by (and constitutive of) particular social contexts, then it is futile to try to describe these patterns with nomothetic traits or values.

(p.344)

Thompson and Haytko (1997) reinforce this conclusion that social context is the setting for meaning creation. Their model (see Exhibit above) includes the co-creative aspect that gives the actor agency, as expressed in words in Holt’s paper.
Individuals are creative and industrious enough to individualize their consumption … but when they do so, they are always working with the existing frameworks of tastes in which they have been socialized.

(p.344)

Now, in conditions of postmodernity, the context dependent dynamics of the setting therefore make researching this topic somewhat challenging. In discussing values, the interior life of the consumer has moved centre-stage. This paper therefore takes the somewhat postmodern perspective that the meaning of consumption is being constructed in the head of the consumer. For it is this very interiority of shared values is what gives it potency as a source of custom for the entrepreneurial smaller business. McAlexander et al’s work (2002), which combines an ethnographic approach with a later quantitative data collection design, has shown the relevance of this interior life to the Jeep brand, as have both Holt’s and Thompson and Haytko’s finely nuanced works with inhabitants of Penn State and fashion-conscious students, respectively. The question then raised, is, how to share values?

The Process of Sharing Values

The process of sharing values is more problematic than the mere inclusion of the construct ‘shared values’ in a list of relationship marketing antecedents (c.f. Shelby & Hunt, 1994). Within the organizational behaviour literature Schein notes that since values are the conscious articulation of basic assumptions, which may well only ever function as prior assumptions, without conscious reflection. They describe what ought to be, rather than what is (1985). Values therefore have a motivational, or aspirational role in individual and corporate lives. In fact values are also relational rather than bi-polar. There may therefore be an often overlooked opportunity to seek to understand and to empathise - Mattson (1997) goes so far as to suggest that it is ‘values which keep the transactions together as a relationship entity’ (p.303). The relational aspect also connects with the fact that valuing, or giving worth, is a community endeavour and based on prior assumptions largely shared in groups. Foxall et al (1998) define values as ‘consensual views about the kind of life individuals should follow, formal and informal rules specifying the goals they should pursue and how they should pursue them’ (p.228).

In the context of this closer look at some of the key constructs for entrepreneurial marketing values are generally understood in this paper to be shared between the organization, in this case the smaller business, and the customer. However, they have also been researched in the context of employees sharing the values of the employer (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2003) who used the ASA (attraction-selection-attrition) framework for noting that employees who have the same values as the organization are attracted, selected and tend to stay. They conceptualize shared values as a global construct in which values are viewed as fundamental, and as relatively enduring. And they can be seen to be relevant right across the stakeholder network. As we have seen, this is dynamic and processual. For example, McAlexander et al (2002), who used an inductive approach to find out whether there were any shared values between the Jeep brand and its customers, did this by observing ways in which ownership motives and experiences intertwined and created and recreated meaning. This meaning creation, co-creation and recreation is the very process of sharing values.
Sensing, Sense-Making and Learning

In this paper we have already drawn attention to some of the weaknesses in the marketing literature where dynamics of culture are often overlooked. In other words, culture is rarely, if ever, depicted as a way of describing the dynamic and sensemaking fabric of the organisation. And this failure to capture the dynamism of complex processes has led to overt acknowledgement of implementation failure in the marketing function. Indeed, as Harris (1996) concludes: ‘While marketers may think they understand the obstacles to market-orientation, they fail to understand the principal barriers’ (p.37). Lists of barriers are made (cf. Dibb & Simkin, 2000), but implementation as making of lists shares a generally held view that implementation is there to be managed; that the issues of putting policy into practice are within the domain of the manager as functionary, not as sensitive shaper of meaning. This reductionist approach can be understood as a fundamentally false premise of marketing theory (Harris & Ogbonna, 1999). For culture is an active, sensemaking way of creating meaning, involving ongoing learning processes and so defies reductionist management. This is of immediate relevance to the smaller organisation and to the entrepreneurial spirit, as can be seen by its fit with two of the fourteen definitions of entrepreneurial marketing produced in a recent report (Carson 2004):

‘Entrepreneurial and Small Business Marketing (ESBM) is managing resources and capabilities required to discover and develop new opportunities’ and ‘ESBM is contextual, is a process and content is situation specific and focused on creativity, opportunities, judgement and vision’.

We have seen that entrepreneurial marketing can gain from understanding marketers as actors playing evolving, dynamic roles with their organisations and customers continuously in a process of adaptation. And how can parties adapt if they cannot learn? Learning is central: Day has noted that ‘Organizations continuously learn about their markets through the linked processes of market sensing and sense making’ (2002 p.240). This is a large area of scholarly endeavour (Chanlat, 1996; Hamel & Doz, 1989; Ibarra-Colado, 1996; Parkhe, 1991; Sparrow, 1998) and the focus here is on the need to take this aspect of organisations when implementing a marketing programme. This is neatly modelled by Sinkula, Baker and Noordewier (1997), who link together gathering market-based information for marketing programmes with organisational learning (see Exhibit 4 below). They conclude that although their empirical model did not explicitly include organisational interpretation and memory, ‘the process of organizational interpretation, and the components of organizational memory as they affect market performance’ (p.315) are priorities for future research.
In gaining insights from the literature, we seek to redress the balance away from those approaches which tend to emphasise the cognitive and calculative interpretations of both knowledge management and the learning organisation. Instead of finding meaning in exchanges as pre-defined, as a product of deduction, the model proposed below (Exhibit 5) indicates the leading role played by inductive processes of a symbolic-interpretivist nature. For as we have demonstrated, when shared values are considered in some detail issues to do with culture are surfaced. As Hatch notes in discussing her model (see Exhibit 2) ‘the values themselves are constituted by perceptions, cognitions, and emotions activated by cultural assumptions’ (1993 p.664). Halliday and Cawley applied her model to inter-organisational relations (Halliday & Cawley, 2000) and clearly it has a contribution to make to the issue of shared values in marketing relationships, particularly when linked to sensing and sense-making. This is a model which has yet to be researched and would seem to offer a fruitful way forward in the current context of entrepreneurial marketing.
Day has summarised the current position regarding the centrality of learning from information:

To complete a continuous process of learning, the organization has to have a way to capture and retain the information and knowledge it has collected, and needs to be able to access this knowledge quickly and efficiently. Advances in information technology have made the process of designing and building these shared knowledge bases on a large scale much easier. The resulting knowledge base may be one of the firm’s most valuable assets.

(Kok, Hillebrand and Biemans, 2003) note that indeed ‘market-oriented product development may be regarded as an organisation learning capability’ (p.137). This brings us back to the basic raison d’être of this paper: innovation as a construct linking the novel with learning. Their perspective in the capabilities encapsulating ‘values as norms, knowledge and skills, technical and managerial knowledge systems which enable learning about markets through information processing behaviour in product development and improve this market learning behaviour’ is very consistent with Day’s model of sensing and sense-making (see Exhibit 6 below). This is still to be researched in the context of the entrepreneurial business.
Their framework offers three clear pointers “to enhance organisational learning about markets and thus create a competitive advantage” (Kok et al, p.156). It links organizational behaviour (c.f Day’s model at Exhibit 6) with organizational cognition. This cognition involves knowledge, skills, technical and managerial systems, in the context of the firms’s values and norms. It offers a holistic view of market oriented product development linking cognition and behaviour; it stresses that it is not the activity per se but the way that the activities are performed that will determine the outcomes – it is a real development on from the reductionist approach to market orientation discussed above; thirdly it ‘demonstrates that information processing activities need to be firmly embedded in the very fabric of the organisation’ (Kok et al, 2003 p.156).

**Relevant Research Approach to Process and Reflection**

What methods might better fit a focus on marketers as actors and might capture the processual flux modeled above? And what might fit the entrepreneur’s acknowledgement method of learning (see Carson, 2004)? An interdependent, contingent approach to capability development
and research has been placed at the centre of a set of processes that can be grouped under the
broad term, ‘action research’. Action research is an approach to research, it is not a unique
discipline, nor a method of research. It involves the researcher in working with members of an
organization over a matter which is of genuine concern to them and in which there is clear intent
by the organization members to take action based on the intervention (Grønhaug et al, 1999).
Action learning is about harvesting the knowledge generated as a result of research. It is a
process of ‘learning through action’ (Johnson, 1998) and fits the entrepreneur’s approach of
learning by doing. The basic unit of action learning is the learning set, comprised of a group of
people joining together in order to take action or ‘getting things done’. Action research and
learning are synthesised by reflection.

At this point learning as an activity is to reflect upon the processes and outcomes of research
activity in an iterative process, in a continuous cyclical pattern, producing the learning process.
Action research generates knowledge of a social system while, at the same time, changing it. It is
an approach (unlike other research approaches which produce findings which may or may not
influence change) that is about changing practice as part of the research itself. It provides for an
understanding that marketers and consumers have multiple identities and conflicting priorities
involvement in this approach to management development and research provides opportunity to
explore the space available to encourage personal expression of values. This brings the
researcher straight to the heart of the concerns raised in this paper – that knowledge is
inextricably linked to culture. Action research fits well with Weick's (1995) central notion that
sense is made in action.

**Exhibit 7: Characteristics of Sensemaking Research Strategies**

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Context preserved or simulated</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Researchers listen to what people say</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Observation</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Participants define the work programme</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Findings described as patterns rather than hypotheses</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Findings evaluated in terms of common-sense and plausibility rather than a priori theories</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Density and vividness aimed for rather than precision and replicability</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Intensive rather than large cases</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Sensemaking to be visible and access chosen as criteria for settings rather than representativeness</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Meanings rather than frequency counts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy</td>
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Adapted from Weick, 1995 pp.172-3

**Implications for Research, Management Practice and Areas for Future Research**

Two decades ago Alvin Toffler wrote:

Above all, the adaptive manager today must be capable of radical action - willing to
think beyond the unthinkable: to reconceptualize products, procedures, programs and purposes before crisis makes drastic change inescapable.

(1984, quoted in Chia 1996 p.409)

This message is still prophetic. This striking statement highlights the value focused on throughout this paper of nurturing a capacity for learning and the skills to enable and motivate learning, in order to develop shared understandings of marketing knowledge and culture. It is of direct relevance to the conclusions of this paper. In order to respond to a dynamic, changing external environment the marketing function has to absorb the current focus on knowledge management. In turn, in order to consider how to deal organisationally with this knowledge, the cultures in the organisation will need to be embraced in any processes for change. In terms of sense making, marketing may well be interpreting from cross-cultural situations in terms of networks of inter-cultural suppliers and consumers. Internally it will also be crossing cultural borders. We propose researching a couple of already published models (Exhibits 5 and 6), linking OB and marketing literatures, whereby processes such as organizational memory and interpretation of marketing outcomes are built into the organisation learning and processes of dissemination of marketing information and reflective adaptation of offerings and programmes continuously contribute to dynamic culture and creation of patterns of meaning for consumers and organisation actors.

Further research will more fully answer the question: How can this be useful in enabling innovation? We have demonstrated how these issues are relevant to entrepreneurial marketing. To conclude, we have provided a theoretical, conceptual, yet practical underpinning for understanding how in product and service innovation to discern and develop patterns of meaning between the firm and its network of stakeholders.

REFERENCES


