

Reflexive construction of industrial marketing problems:

Transparency as reflection and reflexion

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ABSTRACT

Over time, the qualitative IMP approach has effectively developed theory. However, the methodological research approach of IMP has not gained the same interest as the core IMP issues. This might work out as long as IMP researchers work to develop the field together with likeminded; they are writing for IMP's own community, whose members share a set of unspoken methodological presuppositions concerning the 'reality status' of what is studied. However, the last years' conferences have encouraged complimentary theoretical perspectives and the qualitative IMP approach suddenly might embrace several methodological directions. The adherent discussion of methodological consequences has, in large, been missing. In this situation, making transparent the logic of inquiry embedded within different contributions facilitates further theoretical development.

In this paper, I investigate transparency as a quality criterion of reflexive theory construction and implications relating to generalizability, as a response to the call for transparency in case studies (Dubois and Gibbert 2010). The investigation is based on an illustration of a transparent description of a research process and its reporting. Transparency is elaborated on as a situated criterion of quality and of generalizability. In addition, there is a need to make transparent the made choices in the research process in which relational founding is key; both as quality criterion and as base for generalizability. Transparency, relational founding, and ethics are seen as key concepts that might be influential in continued methodological discussions as well as in publications' method sections.

Key words: methodology, constructive-interpretative, transparency, relational founding, ethics.

INTRODUCTION

The IMP tradition is developed in order to gain in-depth knowledge of interactions, relationships, and networks. This has resulted in knowledge of dynamics and complexity in industrial business networks beyond the studied phenomenon's face value. The development has been important to the mapping and the theorizing of industrial marketing and purchasing issues and has also been important as an antithesis to economic approaches to the phenomenon, serving as a critical examiner of their assumptions, approaches and objectives. The IMP tradition includes social behavior and is developed foremost through case studies (Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, and Welch 2007).

Late development of IMP involves cross-discipline inspiration. The 2005 IMP Conference aspired to explore the linkages to the wider area of management research (Dittrich, Jaspers, van der Valk, and Wynstra 2006), the 2006 IMP Conference had the ambition to provide a forum for new perspectives, alternative research methods and new empirical contexts, and so help IMP scholarship to continue evolving (Golfetto, Salle, Borghini, and Rinallo 2007), the 2007 IMP Conference engaged in new perspectives and core concepts (Naudé, Henneberg, Zolkiewski, and Zhu 2009), the 2008 IMP Conference was inspired of similar and dissimilar theoretical and empirical interpretations of the dynamics of the business landscape (Waluszewski, Hadjikhani, and Baraldi 2009). This development of research needs to be followed by a discussion of ways of seeing in which unspoken methodological presuppositions concerning the 'reality status' is clarified (Hatch and Yanow 2008), which actually is rare. Instead a well accepted standard (reliant on objectivism) is used in publications (Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, and Welch 2007).

Hatch and Yanow (2008) argue that each methodology needs to straighten out premises and consequences of its ontology, epistemology and methods. Much IMP studies are qualitative process studies in which the ontology are seldom discussed (Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, and Welch 2007). The range of ontologies discussed in the IMP sphere are objectivism, critical realism and constructivism (Schurr 2004). Constructivism seems to be the least discussed. It is an ontology of process studies that contributes with theories of a temporal and situational character. These contributions have had problems with regard to its legitimacy in relation to studies based on realist assumptions. In a realist-naturalist epistemology; knowledge takes the form of universal principles that are generalizable, but, in a constructivist-interpretivist epistemology; knowledge is context-specific (Hatch and Yanow 2008). Such knowledge aims to create an understanding of the reader in order to facilitate the reader to apply the knowledge in another context. The temporal and situational character of the case study is important to make transparent in order to make possible further research as well as application.

A transparent approach would reduce the level of complexity and walk the reader through the various stages to make the logic, reasoning, and causalities evident of the interplay between theory, empirical phenomenon and method (Dubois and Gibbert 2010). The transparent approach would consequently involve openness about the doing of research as well as the writing of research. With this reasoning, transparency is a criterion that should be used to

evaluate quality in constructivist studies. But, what about the generalizability and scientific legitimacy? Many IMP studies discuss statistical generalization and analytical generalization based on a Yin-rhetoric but little about involving the reader in generalization by presenting the results as paradoxes, metaphors and other devices to increase degree of learning. A lack of scientific legitimacy gives qualitative case based research, and especially non-positivistic case studies, delimited access to top journal publications that embrace the realist canons of 'the scientific method'. However, many case studies are adapting, regardless of ontological preferences, to the realist-natural dress in their method section rhetoric, which prevails and sustains the canon. In order to change the institutionalized way of publishing further development is needed rather than adaptation (Piekkari et al. 2007). Further development needs exemplars of how to do the logic of inquiry justice in the description of method and related discussions of its effectiveness.

I intend to contribute to the debate of IMP's methodological research approach in a number of ways, all related to reflexive constructivism. First, I will illustrate, with an excerpt from my thesis, transparency of case study research. Second, I identify how transparency is a situated criterion of quality and of generalizability that fit the interpretative-constructivist ontological assumptions. Third, transparency includes choices in the research process in order to show the basis of the interpretation and I will discuss how to clarify that decision process. Choices made relate to relational founding, which is made up of people that have a stake in the research process or its outcomes and situate the study and influence its direction, both as quality criterion and as base for generalizability.

The paper is structured as follows. After theoretical framing, an illustration of research process, research writing and reflexivity are provided: The *doings of research* is explained with reflection upon choices made in the doing. Also, writing has a persuasive aim in which a chosen gap, a chosen theoretical framework and a purposeful story are used. The purposeful *research writing* is explained with reflection upon the story that is constructed. Third, a critical examination is discussed of the reflections made and applied through a set of textual *reflexivity* practices. Finally, after a short summary, a concluding discussion of the contribution, this discusses premises and consequences of chosen methodology, ethics and implications and that discussion wraps up the paper.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a wide range of possibilities how to conduct a study, which have implications to the conclusions. A critically and constructive examination of the applied methods adds to the findings, both in terms of meaning making and in applicability. Basically, two types of theories are accentuated, variance theory and process theory (Langley 1999 based on Mohr 1982). These can be developed by qualitative as well as quantitative methods.

Qualitative process theorizing

Langley (1999) differentiates theorizing of change based on whether it is variance theory or process theory. The variance model explains change via attributes of the change and the

process model explains change via events, activities and choices in the process of change (Figure 1).

Mohr (1982) called for a wider application of qualitative explanations based on process theory in order to understand probability and directional forces in a more informed way than provided by variance theory of organizational behavior (Figure 1).

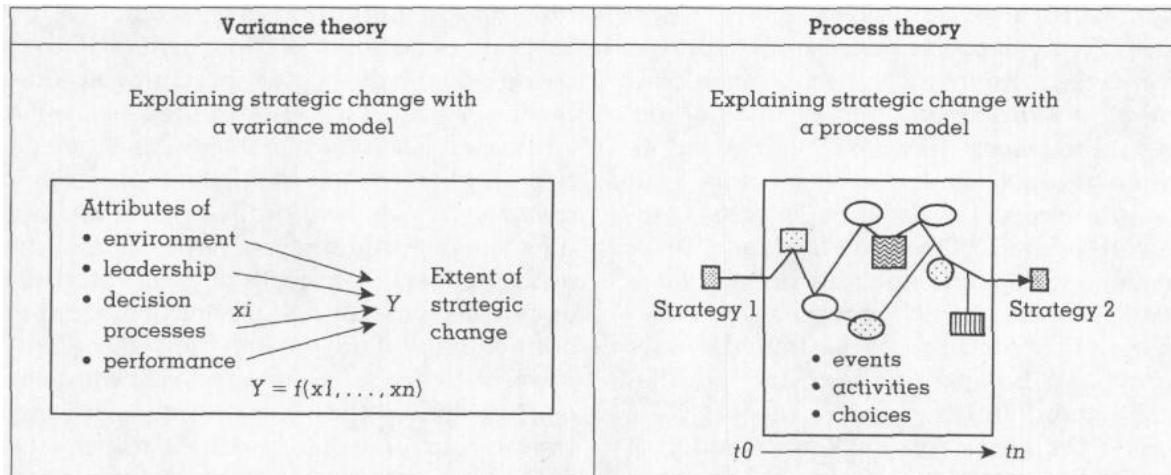


Figure 1 Theorizing based on variance versus process (Figure adapted by Langley 1999 to depict strategic change; from Mohr 1982)

The process approach is often used in order to examine how a process evolves or more often – how it did evolve. The variance approach is often used to find what effects are probable because of a set of variables. This approach seems to be preferred by scholars, who merely see case studies as predecessors to statistical studies and by case methodology proponents that have an objective ontology. The process approach has grown in importance with its influential advocates, such as Andrew Pettigrew or Anne Langley (Langley 1999; Pettigrew 1997). Quality criteria of these approaches to study change have both similarities and differences. The traditional variance approach has reliability, validity and generalizability as its hallmarks of quality. The process approach has, in addition, to show the role of dynamics and complexity and to provide a contextual understanding. Langley (1999) proposes degree of accuracy, of generalizability and of simplicity as better quality criteria. Also important especially in constructivists' studies is sense making, i.e. the process approaches that Langley (1999) describe to have lower degree of generalizability but higher degree of accuracy and simplicity. .

Quality of interpretative constructivism approaches

In order to make sense and create meaning research needs to be interesting reading.

(Bartunek, Rynes, and Ireland 2006) The editors of Academy of Management Journal surveyed the journal's editorial board members' view, which indicated that interesting research both has more influence and might produce a higher degree of learning because of *it is read, understood and remembered*. Intriguing issues have impact but in order to be interesting issues these must be investigated in a competent and defensible manner. Van

Maanen (1979b) argues that an array of interpretive techniques is available to come to terms with the meaning of particular and ambiguous phenomena in the social world. A piece of qualitative research is to be seen as a map of a territory and, as such, the map might be better or worse for reasons such as its *descriptive value, importance to target group and novelty of the findings uncovered*. The map must be able to communicate an understanding and persuade the reader. Thus, the writing is a performance with a persuasive aim because interpretive-constructivist theories are aimed to do practical work: rather than mirror reality, the theories help generate reality for readers (Van Maanen 1995:135). The created knowledge is a way of discursive generalization that is appropriate for social theory (Giddens 1979; 1984).

Sometimes, there seems to be an unfortunate mixing among ways of seeing (Hatch and Yanow 2008) and sometimes these are mixed by intent, for example, in qualitative studies that investigate variances among cases (based on, e.g., Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 1994), which not per se adhere to Van Maanen's (1979b) criteria for evaluating research. Such neo-positivist ideal has been influential as a rhetoric device in methods sections, in order to be published. Many top journals prefer quantitative research but accept qualitative research with a quantitative rhetoric. The problem is that if research is seen to understand something that is objective, then, based on the statistical methods used, it might be meaningful to measure how well it is captured by reliability and validity. However, if research aim to understand a phenomenon that is constructed by the social then *social criteria* for evaluation are needed. Reliability, seen as information to enable a similar study performed by another researcher is irrelevant because studies are situated. Validity, seen as correspondence of the theoretical output to the real, changes in importance, when the real is seen as constructed. Similar to reliability, it becomes irrelevant as a quality measure. The evaluative standards of interpretive science are different than the realist's/naturalist's demands of scientific rigor according to the canons of 'the scientific method'(Hatch and Yanow 2008).

Social criteria for evaluation of the construction and interpretation include the choice of problem, the research process and the outcome, and are described and analyzed by reflection and reflexive practices (Alvesson, Hardy, and Harley 2008; Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000; Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008). These criteria are using ethics instead of statistics as guidance of what account that is qualitatively worthwhile to report (Rhodes and Brown 2005). The quality, regardless of approach is relating to how researchers see; a consistent logic is needed that avoids mixing of realism versus constructivism in how the research is seen and evaluated.

Theorizing in order to explain how and what happened is facilitated by a social practice approach. Practice based studies have increased in importance, potentially because of their aspiration to understand and learn from *what is* in its dynamics and complexity, in order to contribute to increased relevance of theories to practitioners. The aim is learning of development by "following the action" (Czarniawska 2008; Latour 1987). By following the action, boundaries, such as of organizations are seen as discursive elements rather than appropriate boundaries for what to study. The inherent problems in process theorizing (and in IMP theorizing Dubois and Araujo 2004; Piekkari et al. 2007) become less problematic – the

action sets “the level” and the study follows. In practice studies, the interactions over time delimit the case.

Reflexive construction based in abduction

The practice approach, especially actor-network theory, has been used in order to derive new insights to issues that make sense to the industrial network approach (see e.g. Hagberg 2008; Hoholm 2009). Ideas are followed in their development with methods, such as shadowing (Czarniawska 2008), and by being in the field where the happening takes place (Hoholm 2009). The practice approach is empirically driven while an abductive approach also is fruitful to create interesting development of IMP research (Dubois and Gadde 2002). Systematic combining is one way (Dubois and Gadde 2002), and Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2007; 2000) reflexive construction, i.e. mystery construction is another. The “mystery” is based in a surprise and a feeling of “this is interesting”, which is an indication that a theoretically informed assumption does not hold. The construction is seen as a decision tree of research process decisions. This kind of explicitness, for example, a decision tree, is needed in industrial marketing studies (Järvensivu and Törnroos 2010). Because a problem in flexible approaches of exploration is that these are based on choices because of case-specifics, i.e. these are custom made rather than standardized, and need to be explained towards the reader/evaluator. Therefore, openness and transparency about the research process and also research ethics are key in these studies (Järvensivu and Törnroos 2010). Research reflexivity in industrial marketing studies might be facilitated of textual practices that are used in organization studies (see, e.g., Alvesson et al. 2008), in order to ensure quality and show it to the reader.

Following the constructivist-interpretivist epistemology, the hubris of generalizations should be refused (Rhodes 2009). Questions for learning based on context-specific knowledge are better equipment for insights than ready-made answers reliant on a number of assumptions. Questions provoke thinking, which generates possibilities in an application of the results. The questioning seeks openness rather than closure and prescriptions. The reasoning is based on that research development is a pretext for conversations, it stimulates activity, adaptive processes and use; it is a part in theorizing (Colville, Waterman, and Weick 1999). This means that output from interpretative studies should provide understanding and learning in order to enable the reader to verify, validate, and generalize the learning. The understanding is founded in transparency of the theorizing, which next will be illustrated.

ILLUSTRATION

The following illustration is an excerpt from a longer manuscript of the methodology of a practice study with methods for “seeing practice as weaving-together effects” (Gherardi 2009). It includes three important discussions related to transparency. First, reflections of doing research that illustrates choices made in the research process. Important to that section is the role of the relational founding in the research process and in the evaluation of it. Second, reflections of writing research; an endeavor that connects to the relational founding and describe the intention with the text produced, which is important in that the text intends

to inform the reader's understanding. Finally a reflexion of the theory construction is described.

Excerpt from manuscript: "Reflections on doing research"

"Doing research is a process rather than a project. The research process develops with choices of empirical matters and the interpretative repertoire of the researcher. I would like to characterize my research process as a constructed intrigue founded in relations to different research companions. The construction is informed by empirical matters and by theory and the relational founding is the source, means and ends in the research.

A reflexive contribution to established theory is possible through a systematic search for deviations from what would be expected in empirical contexts for inspiration in critical dialogues between theoretical frameworks and further empirical work (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007). The direction of the dialogue might be changed because of changes in the empirical case, the choice of theory, and methods applied..." Following this introduction two phases of the research process are described.

The first phase of the empirical study

"In August 2003 we were invited ...". Hereafter follows a description of activities, time, actors and empirical outcomes of activities that was carried out in order to learn from the empirical. The description attempts also to show how I make sense of the material:

"The SCMo [the studied project] set up was meaningful to my study because of the common learning and the access it provided to the issue. I saw this unique opportunity to study a case of increased supply chain integration as essential to learn from and learn with a process study. Process studies are, in brief, used to understand how a sequence of events changes over time (Langley 1999; Pettigrew 1992)... However, the SCMo project ended and I had to re-evaluate my study. For a fact, the project ended before it affected supply chain integration. It would be possible to use the material and do a more static case study of it, searching for themes and variables that made sense. But then, my presumptions of the importance of dynamics could not be investigated. What was this about (more than an ended project)? The project offered a well-accepted conceptual solution to a well-known problem and it was prioritized by the management as an issue of strategic importance. What was the problem? That is, beyond the lack of resources; or was it just the lack of resources that was the problem? In a few attempts to interpret the development I co-authored a chapter about the characteristics of SCMo, such as power and transparency, wrote an article about power in supply chain development issues and also authored a conference paper about objectives, the meaning of efficiency and effectiveness in supply chains. However, as far as I could understand from the empirical study, it was not a question of less integration or about inertia, because the coordination continued in other ways. How would this influence my research? One option was to end the process and go deeper into the context and understand it (potentially by comparing this implementation to other implementations). However, that was not so interesting because similar studies exist. The newness and contribution from the

process study was in the participative method and its inherent possibilities to understand integrative processes.

Then I try to show the flexibility at hand by the approach and how I used it: *“Instead I decided to pick up some interesting empirical deviations from what would be expected and develop my theoretical understanding. My choice of method needed alignment with the phenomenon instead of sticking to analytic labels and pre-formulated research strategies (Czarniawska 2008; Van Maanen 1979a). The SCMo project was about better matching demand and supply and aimed to increase integration of the supply network in that ambition, but the distribution network was not involved. This meant that when matching demand and supply, the important demand side was not included and the project participants knew very little about the distribution network.”*

Then follows two examples of similar case studies; (Hallström 2005; Holweg 2002; Holweg 2003; Holweg and Pil 2004), which in relation to each other revealed that there was an unresolved theoretical issue and the implications of this insight, which was worthwhile to take up in a new approach in order to increase understanding. *“I decided to change my approach at this point. My empirical material involved a unique case (in the automotive industry) of customized production and I had access to empirical material regarding the initiation of the development. In addition, I could see an opportunity in applying a practice lens on the development in order to gain deeper understanding of the content and process of the development. After this turnaround I might see the SCMo project as an attempt to stabilize certain working procedures in the bigger picture of development instead of as a change process of integration. Thus, in the research process I changed my assumptions of what was happening.”*

The last phase of the empirical study

“Unexpectedly, two students who studied another project at Volvo Cars argued that despite the customer ordered production, that is, that all cars are produced for a specific customer, a dealer they interviewed was troubled by all cars that they owned and had not yet sold.

What was happening? My supervisor had studied the implementation of the build-to-order strategy and learned that no car was produced unless it was customer ordered and we had learned that this strategy was alive through the SCMo project. This was strange. Based on theory, we would have expected to find a production-oriented logic in the part of the supply chain that produces cars and a customer-oriented logic at the dealers’. But here we learned that the supply chain acted in line with the build-to-order logic and the dealers were plagued by cars in stock because of a forecast-based logic. The development contradicted our assumptions.

“Was this related to the SCMo project? It would be easy to say that this is something quite different because it is related to another process, but it is still connected to the functioning of the order fulfillment procedures. Pettigrew described a process as a river of several streams flowing into one another in a terrain, constraining and enabling each other (Pettigrew 1997)” and the customer-ordered-production development might be seen in a similar way. In

such circumstances the practice lens is an appropriate methodology in order to analyze either how parallel streams of action might reinforce or transform the development or how these enforce stability". Thus, in this passage the rationale for aligning methodology is described and then some consequences are outlined:

"...the practice approach is a better approach in order to understand what is happening with the idea and strategy of customer ordered production. A practice approach attempts to follow the action and create meaning of its transformation and consistency. My change in approach evolved in line with the change of my empirical study in order to explain the happening or not happening of a specific idea rather than of an organization. To follow what was intriguing has consequences. I decided to follow a specific development by learning from purposefully questions to the empirical field and literature..." Following this, I explain the position taken, still as a part of a reflection of the research process, but now in an analytic way.

Seeing practice and its effects by a texture of interconnections in action

Now follows a longer excerpt explaining the position: *"The relational founding from the earlier part of the study provided another type of access and avenue of learning. To me, doing research is learning about what is going on and to construct a mystery and then "solve" it meaningfully because I want to interpret the meaning of the research object (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007; Asplund 1970). Therefore the empirical study evolved, but now I had to arrange the access "from outside". I referred to the earlier cooperation when arranging new interviews and the sake of their strategy. Those that I contacted were genuinely interested but we did not know each other as was the case in the SCMo working group. And, the learning was related to the development of customer ordered production. How would that affect my study?"*

"Well, in a constructivist/interpretivist study, which relies on an intersubjective ontology, the interpretation arises from interactions and reflexions in order to see constructions and learn what is going on (Hatch and Yanow 2008). Much interpretative research draws on Clifford Geertz's concept of thick descriptions (Geertz 1973). How thick is a thick description? Geertz argues that we need to see beyond the "face value" of what we study. A common misunderstanding is that researchers have to live in the studied cultures in order to understand them. Another misunderstanding suggests that more empirical information results in better descriptions. In some of the recently published dissertations in Sweden this is evident; the field study tends to be extended and involves hundreds of hour-long interviews and videotaping in addition to participation in meetings. This material is then used to interpret common themes. Such field studies are purposeful especially in studies that rely on an objective ontology, in which methodology helps to fully represent the observed objects (Hatch and Yanow 2008). These studies are in contrast to constructivist/interpretivist studies that are grounded in the intersubjective ontology. The interpretation in this case arises from interactions and reflexions in order to see constructions and learn what is going on (Hatch and Yanow 2008)."

“Actually, explorative interpretive theory development relies on insights. The conventional wisdom in qualitative case study research that the findings of the case depend on the identification of common themes across the interview statements of multiple informants has been challenged by the argument that the number of cases or the number of interviews loses in importance if the aim is to get new insights (Llewellyn and Northcott 2007). Following the same line, Alvesson (2003) criticizes the dominating neo-positivist and romantic views on interviews and argues that interviews might be used to explore issues. The interview is a site for new insights. Thus, the interview is a shared experience and a site for further empirical and theoretical exploration rather than a window to see a “reality”. The empirical material is seen as inspiration that results in learning based on knowledge, which is of importance in order to gain new insights into a productive inquiry (Cook and Brown 1999).”

“My productive inquiry has emerged—from studying a process of changed supply chain integration to studying development of an idea, the build-to-order strategy. The decision to change focus was connected to the closing of the SCMo project and the peculiar indications of what the order fulfillment process had developed into. The research logic involved systematic combining (Dubois and Gadde 2002) and was abductive (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008). The history is constructed to make a point (Van Maanen 1995), and also the interpretative analysis involving use of theory and further empirical fieldwork is constructed in order to increase knowledge of the development of customer ordered production (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007). Theorizing as sense making is based in pragmatist philosophy and takes a constructionist perspective (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007; Czarniawska 2008). Thus, in this continuation I searched for meaning of the development in different empirical sources.”

“The empirical material I used, besides my own participation in interviews and meetings, is written sources.” These are described in an appendix, together with the questions that I putted to the material and are not included in this paper. *“One source was Mediearkivet, which is a digital full-text database of newspapers that includes material from more than 300 Swedish printed newspapers, magazines and business press, dating back to 1987. Volvo Cars is a business of great importance in Sweden which has attracted and still attracts interest from media. Media discuss what is happening when it is happening with a specific perspective such as critical examination, pitching good news or just reporting on the latest development. I used search criteria such as Volvo Cars and customer ordered production in Swedish. Another source is my supervisor’s material from the study of the first phase of the development. In addition, an important source is other research reports; Volvo Cars has attracted a huge interest from academia, and some dissertations have been valuable to my inquiry.”*

“Also, I searched for meaning by writing papers (two co-authored with my supervisor about strategic development in supply chains and about strategic content issues in logistics and SCM research and one as a sole author about methodology) in order to refine the problem, the empirical material and my interpretative theoretical repertoire in line with Weick’s argument that interpretative activities are to make sense: “How can I know what I think until I see what I say?” (Weick 1995a). Thus, my writing is preceded by a way of seeing and a way

of thinking that is based in knowing, and this interpretive process is based in my identity as a researcher that is made up by interactions in relationships. Consequently, the dialogue that reflexive construction is based on is reliant on interactions in relationships. Therefore, the relational foundation affects trustworthiness and applicability of the research outcome but also acts as an energizer. Huff (2009) emphasizes that as scholars we are involved in a conversation by interacting with other scholars, and as a good conversation stimulates development, we need to choose the conversation in order to increase knowledge and be published, i.e., be listened to in public. Actually, the relational foundation is argued to be an underappreciated dimension of interesting research because it acts as a feeder and enabler of the overall quality of a research project (Dutton and Dukerich 2006). Interaction partners within the foundation can include co-members of a research team, people whom one is studying and individuals who are neither researchers nor participants, but who, through their direct or indirect contributions to the research, affect research quality (Dutton and Dukerich 2006:21). Next, I will elaborate a little on the relational challenges relating to access, learning and collaboration that have contributed to the quality of my research project.”

Relational foundation

The following excerpt on relational founding is important both for the assessment of quality and for describing the relevance. *“Theoretical literature is ideas, argumentations and a huge amount of investments (careers, financing, emotions, etc.) and acts as a conversation partner that sometimes engages and at other times leaves me cold. The literature is the official conversation that is able to invite new conversation partners and acts as an open invitation. I have sought conversation partners partly by subject search and partly by getting to know my conversation partners’ partners, i.e., looking into their references. The continuous writing of papers gives me access to blind review comments and an indication of whether my contribution to the conversation makes sense.*

Authors gather to converse at conferences, which are opportunities to learn more about both the conversation partners and new ideas. I have taken part and I like to take part in the NOFOMA conference, the CEMS workshop, the IMP conference and others. I have engaged in logistics, SCM and industrial purchasing and marketing discussions. Hitherto, I have participated in one conference with reference to the strategy-as-practice field, which also inspired me, especially since two colleagues and I created writing workshops where we energized each other in the discussions and targeted this conference each with one presentation. More conversations through conferences are difficult to manage because each demands a great amount of resources, such as time and funding of conference and travel costs. Thus, acceptance by peer reviews and interaction in research communities act as a basis for the research process’ quality.

“...The relational foundation with my supervisor has been precious in the study of Volvo Cars and in theoretical discussions. We have shared a genuine interest in the empirical part as well as in much of the theory, which gives a possibility for me to learn as in an apprenticeship with friendly but constructive criticism along the way, which might be more important to the overall quality than the more outcome-related blind review comments. Co-working gives access to insightful comments on ethical issues, quality issues and the

decisions that direct the research process as it proceeds. Besides the learning aspect, I accessed the early part of the empirical study in this relationship, via documents from that period, transcriptions, discussions and joint participation in a teaching case, which makes sense in the interpretation of that material as well as in what questions to ask next. In the early phase of the study a colleague and I shared the work of transcribing interviews, and together with my supervisor we acted as a research team participating in the SCMo project, discussing the empirical material and its inherent surprises. However, also the SCMo project group participated in some of these discussions and took advantage of our material, which contributed to the overall quality in that phase as it was meaningful and created productive questions...” In addition to the relation to researchers, the relational founding to the practitioners is in work for relevance of the study. If the research is relevant to practitioners then learning of its results is likely. The situational generalizability relates to the readers future capability to theorize and take advantage of this refined way of viewing the problem at hand. This line of argumentation draws on Giddens (1979; 1984) view of generalizations based on social theories.

Excerpt from manuscript: “Reflections on writing research”

“Writing up research is often a retrospective action in order to make sense of the research results to others. The material I write up is an informed choice based in an interpretive repertoire developed through unofficial papers, such as doctoral course papers and through peer-reviewed papers (different parts of the academic conversation). As my study changed in its characteristics when I was doing the research, the papers and my interpretive repertoire developed in order to make sense of what was happening. The published papers along my study involves ...” And then followed the line of inquiry I had followed shown by papers that was authored. However, the thesis also involves steps in the theorizing: *“The empirical part of this thesis should be read as a narrative based on my sense making, which is created by interactions with people involved in the development and with literature. The empirical part is written in order to illustrate the parallel streams of happening that enforce and contradict each other and the specifics of the order fulfillment practice that is influential in the strategic development. The description is a step in the theorizing. The theoretical framework is another stepping stone...”* Then I explain my intention with the framework, which is followed by an analytical explanation that also discusses generalization as an outcome of theorizing: *“Theory in this perspective is seen by Colville, Waterman and Weick (1999) not only as a map in line with Van Maanen (1979b), but also as past, present and future: as a resource of retrospective sense making, as present interaction and translation between theory and practice in a conversation and as future sense making of ideas with explanatory possibilities rather than explanatory predictions. Thus, theorizing includes sense making of the past, the present and the future. My interpretation is ongoing and situational, and future interpretations will have another past, present and future hopefully involving some reflections based on this research. How can the findings be generalized and interesting to practitioners? Colville et al. (1999) argue that sense making of academic writing to practitioners is achieved by (1) using a broker or an editor who is able to point out the meaning by cues, feelings and experiences or by (2) keeping ambiguity and inviting readers to project their experiences and learn from*

that. The alive and unfinished theory that resonates with the reader is exemplary – good theory is a pretext for conversation; it stimulates activity and adaptive processes. Good conversations are social processes for bringing people and ideas together and creating something that was not there before – theorizing (Colville et al. 1999:143), based in an intersubjective ontology (Hatch and Yanow 2008)... “ The quality and possibility to generalize findings that are described needs to be assessed from the text: “Czarniawska (2008) calls for novel ways of presenting the material, such as photo reportages, which seem to target an aesthetic understanding via other media than text. However, also text might be used in novel ways of writing up ethnographies in order to reach different readers, such as dramatizing them or creating heroic stories of nitty-gritty happenings. Or, as Czarniawska draws on Latour’s (1996) text and symmetry principle in order to show a good example of a text, this illustrates different possible “worlds” in conflict that move and shape one another. And more importantly, the “worlds” need to be free from judgment until the end. She argues that questions about a text, such as whether it is reliable, valid or at all science, should be replaced by questions such as: Is it interesting? Is it relevant? Is it beautiful? The text should be read and create interest for further conversation (Czarniawska 2004a:136). All descriptions involve interpretations, no matter if photographs, dramas or sticking-close-to-the-field quotes are used (Czarniawska 2008:16).” Thus, the criteria of assessment can of course be related to verification and validity but on its on terms that relate to social interaction. This is important to clarify to the reader that otherwise will apply the institutionalized assessment criteria (the scientific canon).

I use text and figures in my empirical chapters in order to construct a history of a strategy’s development: *“In my empirical part, the parallel streams of happening in the order fulfillment practice and the strategic development serve as the plot. It should be clear that I want to make a point of the text, which is informed by interactions with the empirical field and with the literature (Alvesson 2003; Alvesson and Kärreman 2007; Czarniawska 2004b). It is thought of as a history that leads to a point based on an intrigue that is arranged of actual occasions and activities (Czarniawska 1997). Often a timeline is used to situate a scenario, but time gives a poor structure to my story. For example, Ericson (2008) uses a musical metaphor, the fugue, to describe the structure. She uses the fugue in order to capture a flow of strategic activities and to represent dynamism, constituted in themes that are repeated, expanded and varied. I use the parallel streams of happening in order to represent strategic development instead of using time.”* The continued writing (analysis and conclusions) follows from the choices made in the earlier parts and therefore I saw few reasons to describe the writing of them. However, reflexion as a second thought of the chosen research account is important and was included as follows:

Excerpt from manuscript: “Reflexions on theory construction”

“... it is argued that reflexivity is a route to more thoughtful and interesting research (Alvesson et al. 2008). In this line of reasoning, reflexivity means a second thought of what one is doing and, especially, the role that different moves and maneuvers play in producing particular research accounts. It may also inspire creativity through opening up for new perspectives and providing reference points for what one is doing (Alvesson et al. 2008;

Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000). However, without critical interrogation, reflexivity may be used as a cynical rhetorical device designed to demonstrate researcher credentials and it may primarily fulfill ceremonial purposes of legitimating (Alvesson et al. 2008)...” Then follows a reflection about the spotted gap and my response. “... Thus, I have a critical view of SCM as well as of those devil’s advocates who claim its non-existence. It is more fruitful to understand the meaning in what is ongoing. With that ambition I use the practice-based approach in order to increase learning of and to practice and so bring together theory and practice instead of being deeply involved in either of them. In this sense, I use a destabilizing reflexive practice, which I will describe in more detail, because not only socially constructed concepts but also my construction needs critical examination (Wenneberg 2000)...”

First, my situated study and critical examination follows a tradition in Swedish organization and management research (Alvesson 1995; Brunsson 1981; Czarniawska 1993). Second, I am contributing to an intersection in the theoretical domains of strategizing, the IMP and the SCM literature, by creating a language for description and understanding of phenomena. Definitions, words and descriptions of phenomena are facilitators to understanding and acting. In my research approach I have relied to a great extent on Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) and agree that linguistic and theoretical development requires a freer stance and a somewhat weaker coupling with "pure" empirical facts than what inductive approaches require (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967) and a stronger coupling with theories, approaches, etc. (Alvesson 1995:48). This does not mean that empirical studies are unimportant but that interpretation is a process of empirical material, the interpreter, the research design and the research project. Alvesson (see, e.g., 1995) defines interpretation by drawing on Asplund’s (1970) questioning of meaning of a social phenomenon by interpreting and making sense of its basic character arguing that interpretation is the act of giving a phenomenon meaning or discovering (something of) its 'inherent' purpose of significance. Czarniawska (2008) seems to have a stronger faith in the inherent possibility of stories to make meaning and a worry that premature theorizing might produce bad theories. In my view, these are proponents of two complementary dimensions of sense making, i.e., they use different acts of interpretation. However, it seems as if both Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2007) way of reasoning and Czarniawska’s (2004a) way of reasoning can be expressed in the words of Lewin: “There is nothing more practical than a good theory” (Lewin 1945:129, quoted in Ghoshal 2005), based on their grounding in pragmatism and guiding principle of whether the results work. “

I use advancements in writings of reflexion in order to analyze my approach in terms of the process, the results and what it might construct in terms of effects: “Alvesson et al. (2008) identify four sets of textual practices that constructivist researchers in the field of organization and management theory have used in their attempts to be reflexive. The reflexive practices relate to theoretical reflexivity, the field worker’s reflexivity, institutional reflexivity and reflexivity by deconstruction, and are labeled multi-perspective, multi-voicing, positioning and destabilizing reflexivity...” the discussion that follows analyze (1) that by using a multi-perspective approach also anomalies among perspectives are investigated because the accumulation of perspectives add reflexivity to study. A longer discussion of the rationale and making of my approach is omitted in this paper. (2) Multi-voicing practices:

because of the researcher's authoritative role of creating meaning, my experiences and interests in the process and my choices matters. Therefore, research accounts need to show that researchers as well as research subjects are vulnerable and experiencing, and are working to coproduce knowledge. And, the Section "Reflections on writing research" is devoted to this but a discussion of ethics needs to be added. (3) Positioning practices are to clarify issues, such as why we draw on specific knowledge claims, and why we expect that our contribution should be accepted, which I discussed in "Reflections on doing research". (4) The gap-spotting, critical examination of research accounts and academic conversation are destabilizing practices in that these practices target unreflexive research of others. These practices are intended to destabilize others' epistemological assumptions and criticize the conditions and consequences of a theory's rationality, truth, and progress.

Summarizing, the plan behind the study was to create a meaning of the development. The two different phases of the study involved fundamentally different access to the research object. The first phase relied on participation in a project while the other relied on tracing; the access in the first phase was from inside the happening as a co-creator while the last phase was from outside as I weaved together interconnections in action. Both are feasible for a practice lens (Gherardi 2009) but I took that lens by the time of the second phase as the shift made me reflect on the design, what the case would be about and the outcome. Assessment of the method applied relies on the discussions that are included (the research process, the writing up, and reflexion), which forms transparency that next will be discussed.

SUMMARISING THE ILLUSTRATION'S TRANSPARENCY

Interpretative research is possible in a wide range of approaches. I have reflected on the reflexive constructive approach I have used that ended in my choice to "seeing practice and its effects by a texture of interconnections in action", which also is mirrored in the presentation of the empirical material and the theoretical framework. This endpoint is a pragmatic result of a dialogue with the relational foundation I have accounted for. The trustworthiness is explained much in terms of plausibility in the research process and in the results of the theorizing. It is related to a relational foundation that also determines the value of the contribution in terms of the extent that others choose to draw on the knowledge claims. The relational foundation acts as a feeder and enabler of the overall quality of a research project (Dutton and Dukerich 2006), not only based on trustworthiness but also in order to create interesting research. I have argued, in line with Czarniawska (2004a:136) that the usual scientific questions, such as: Is this reliable? Is this valid? Or, at all, is it science?, should be replaced by plausibility questions, such as: Is it interesting? Is it relevant? Is it beautiful?, because the account should be read and create interest for further conversation. The basic ontological difference is key; objectivism is in contrast to my constructivist/interpretivist study. My answers to Czarniawska's questions are discussed in reflections on doing research and on writing research, and by theory construction reflexions. The readers with an objective ontology, might prefer a methodology that fully represent the observed objects (Hatch and Yanow 2008). However, Dubois and Gibbert (2010) seek to provide common ground between orthodox objective view and unorthodox abductive approaches, because too often methodological debates take place between proponents of different positions and are far from

fruitful: “For instance, a case study relying on an abductive approach resulting in a case used both as inspiration and illustration to develop a theoretical idea, should not be judged based on Yin's or Lincoln and Guba's deductive quality criteria” (Dubois and Gibbert 2010:135). Their conclusion, of how to bridge, is to provide a transparent approach to the interplay between theory, empirical phenomenon and method. The transparency should make explicit the various stages in an effort to make the logic, reasoning, and causalities evident. My approach of making transparent the research doing, research writing, and theory construction works to illustrate the choices made and its implications. Thereby discursive generalizability (i.e. providing reader with equipment for another understanding) (Giddens 1979) and quality criteria such as descriptive value, importance to target group and novelty of the findings uncovered (Van Maanen 1979b; Van Maanen 1995) are feasible. Also, the social criteria for evaluation of the construction and interpretation include the choice of problem, the research process and the outcome, and are described and analyzed by reflection and reflexive practices (Alvesson et al. 2008; Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2000; Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008), which the illustration provides an example of. In this case, ethics instead of statistics should act as guidance of what account that is acceptable (Rhodes and Brown 2005). Ethics is guided by the relational founding.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

My ambition to illustrate a transparent approach is done with an excerpt from my thesis, which includes reflection of doing, of writing case study research and of research reflexion. Transparency of how a thesis is developed in interplay between theory, the empirical matter, and method shows the basis of the interpretation. Quality criteria in terms of standardized procedures capturing reliability and validity cannot be used because they rely on an opposing set of ontological assumptions.

Transparency not only shows the basis of the interpretation but also the relational foundation (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2008; Dutton and Dukerich 2006) that are decisive as social criterion in assessments of such research accounts. In this case the transparency works both as social quality criterion and as determinant of the generalization. Social criteria influence the research process in terms of choices and what is seen as good and bad research. Social criteria also establish generalizability, such as the value of the research. Note that generalizability shifts in meaning and becomes a social construct that denotes use value. The relational founding decides whether the research results are interesting, relevant, and leads to beautiful explanations, paradoxes and metaphors, which is founded in its descriptive value, importance to target group and novelty of the findings uncovered (Van Maanen 1979b; Van Maanen 1995) Thus, now generalizability is seen as use value, i.e. what does this text do to my understanding and forthcoming actions. Use value in research would be if others choose to draw on the findings and use value in practice would be if a phenomenon is explained and given complementary insights. Thus, the role of relational founding is to situate the study and influence its direction both to feed and to enable the overall quality of a research project (Dutton and Dukerich 2006). Ethics is a constituent part of such generalizability (Rhodes and Brown 2005).

Premises and consequences of reflexive constructivism methodology

A reflexive construction, such as a mystery construction, is built of choices in the research process regarding theory, empirical material and method that needs to be illustrated and be made transparent in order to show the basis of the interpretation. The construction is made up of a set of arguments with logic, reasoning, and causalities that in various stages build the construction (Dubois and Gibbert 2010). By following the action, the inherent problems in process theorizing is less problematic – the action sets “the level” and the study follows, boundaries such as organizations are seen as discursive elements rather than anything else. Moreover, if actor-network theory is seen to take off in an empirical idea and action, then Alvesson and Kärreman’s (2007; 2000) approach of reflexive construction, i.e. mystery construction, might be seen to take off in the theoretically informed empirical idea. The mystery construction is precise about in what way a research process is abductive, which is called for (Järvensivu and Törnroos 2010), namely a decision tree of research process decisions.

A premise for construction is imagination and an eye for deviations or surprises. The origin to see and understand is thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) in order to contribute with critical insights, holistic understanding and plausible explanations. In constructivist/interpretivist studies, which rely on an intersubjective ontology, the interpretation arises from interactions and reflexions in order to see constructions and learn what is going on (Hatch and Yanow, 2008). Detailed realist-objective views are quite different from impressions of different dimensions of dynamics and complexity in constructivist/interpretivist views. An important difference is that the former is deliberate in its design while the latter might emerge with the studied. How it emerges depends on inspiration (Langley 1999) or imagination (Weick 1989), inspiration is seen as one theory building process, complementing induction and deduction, which also are involved to different degree over the research process. Imagination in this case is the set up of the construction (or the parts and chosen direction of the mystery). For example, an unexpected empirical material is encountered. The material cannot plausibly be accounted for by available theory. This is surprising in the meaning that a previous concept or an assumption is falsified (Weick 1989). The surprise is a breakdown in research understanding. In order to move from breakdown to construction, the theoretical contribution has to be formulated in terms of relevance of findings, problems in theoretical background and proposed new understanding. More systematic work is needed both by going back and forth to the research site and by engaging in additional literature. Thus, abduction is used to interpret and construct a mystery in a sensitive and reflexive way, which is a systematic combination of theory, empirical material and imaginative resources to develop explanations (Dubois and Gadde 2002).

The consequences of a reflexive construction methodology relate to theory building and theorizing. Basically, the novel insights from the construction are new concepts, new theoretical frameworks or new metaphors (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007). In addition, theory is no longer aiming for an objective true. Instead theory needs to work in terms “There is nothing more practical than a good theory” (Lewin 1945:129 in Ghoshal 2005). Theorizing is viewed as theoretical reasoning in which theoretical frameworks as well as empirical work

are parts in use (see discussion Sutton and Staw 1995; Weick 1995b). Consequently, subjectivity is important since the research is a constructed dialogue between a researcher's interpretive repertoire and empirical findings. The boundaries emerge during the research process. Thus, the outcome is a thick description based on and bounded by the mystery development. The methodology is effective in industrial marketing studies where a phenomenon is spread, for example, over time and organizations, and it is followed by its action in an emergent research process. Most qualitative approaches are wide in scope from the start and attempt deliberately to categorize and compare but this approach attempts to explore and are emergent and narrow from the start. It emerges along the way that the researcher's interpretive repertoire allows it to take. Another researcher is most likely to use a different interpretive repertoire. Also, there is no obvious starting or end point. What is surprising and challenging in one perspective is of minor importance in another. Further, what is intelligible in one perspective is obscure in another. This is in line with the constructive/interpretive presuppositions but challenges a common view that empirical or theoretical objective saturation must be achieved. Therefore, the protection from the authoritative "Scientific Method", including statistical mystification is relieved, and the story told needs to legitimize its existence. The less precise documentary and the more fiction that is involved the more important ethics and transparency become. Thus, subjectivity calls for an ethical consideration.

Ethics

Ethics is becoming more important as empirical material is becoming less verbatim represented and sense making is seen as important. Rhodes and Brown ask: "if a researcher is not responsible for 'telling the truth' what is s/he responsible for?" (2005:11). This is a question related to generalizability but beyond an illustration of reflection and reflexion. Ethics cannot be dealt with through new programs and practices; instead, it means to be sensitive to reflexivity and its promises and potential. Rhodes' (2009) view of how to achieve ethics in an interpretative/constructive approach is writing in a way that asks questions rather than provides answers; that refuses the hubris of generalizations; that provokes thinking rather than provides answers; that generates possibilities rather than prescriptions; that seeks openness rather than closure. Rhodes implies that the researcher role is not to prescribe but to critically examine and elucidate dynamics and complexity in questions and open up for wider applications. In my preferences this is accomplished by going to depth with paradoxes capturing the complexities we are trying to make sense of. IMP-research is often regarded to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. A prime example considering Rhodes ethics is a prescriptive IMP paper discussing "How should companies interact in business networks?" (Håkansson and Ford 2002). In that, the authors explore complexities related to business networks in terms of a number of paradoxes and analyze these taking considerations to dynamics. They explain that developing relationships is similar to a testing process, involving both opportunities and threats in networks, and aspects of both influencing and being influenced. By the paradoxes, they make clear that despite understanding there is no optimal solutions, any specific situation and context is in need of a re-evaluation and formulation of new questions. The Håkansson-and-Ford article is interesting from an ethical point of view

and also from a generalization view. Dubois and Gibbert (2009) engaged in making complex case studies transparent via research procedures but engaged less in the problem of generalizability. I argued earlier that transparency adds to generalizability and the article exemplifies how questions, metaphors and paradoxes provide insights and use value.

Implications

Transparency and ethics are influential to determine quality and generalizability in reflexive construction of industrial marketing problems. Järvensivu and Törnroos (2010) called for explicit elaboration of the abductive process and as a response I propose an elaborated reflection of the research process and of the decisions related to writing, in addition to reflexions on theory construction.

Theory that is of a temporal and situational character needs to be recognized as such also in article form. Often, qualitative research is argued to be more difficult to publish than quantitative. Canons of ‘the scientific method’ have the power of the past, science as an artifact and many research communities as upholders. The discourse of the “Scientific Method” influence also interpretative researchers to disguise their quality criteria and generalization discussions as realist accounts of reliability and validity. Therefore, criteria, for example, regarding transparency in reflexive theory construction is slowed down in its development. The example I have provided is neither a best nor a worst case but a base for discussion. Dubois and Gibbert (2010) concluded by suggesting that the range of approaches possible to case research in industrial marketing is promising for the development of research in the field, as long as these reduce, rather than increase, the complexity of the case studied. They seem to be more concerned about the output than transparency and quality as they propose that a good case study provides a model of reality, not reality itself. The approach I contribute with is engaging in use value by proposing questions for debate and paradoxes enlightening understanding.

The doing of research was to me, a process in different stages that had implications to choice of method and to choice of interpretative repertoire. Deviations and falsified assumptions along the road facilitated the decisions about how the study might emerge. Still, it is choices of what to focus on. Other decisions are possible, which would lead in other directions. Doing research is in my reflection guided by the empirical development, literature, additional questions, and, importantly, the relational founding. Dutton and Dukerich’s modest proposition about the role of relational founding for interesting is underappreciated in its value in the process and in verification and validation of results, is confirmed in this study. The theorizing discussed, aims to generate possible ways for readers (Colville et al. 1999; Van Maanen 1995). By reflexion of the theory construction, a consideration of what the theorizing will do to different scientific fields is added. Theorizing represents a continuous elaboration that ends more of pragmatic reasons, such as “the sense making at hand is sufficient and plausible” (Weick 1995a).

In all, is the illustration that includes reflection of the research process/writing and reflexion of theory construction providing the transparency that is needed? In that case, might such an

illustration be efficient enough taking in the page limits in articles? And maybe more important, is it only transparency that is needed in reviewer conversations or are ontological assumptions hindering a fruitful discussion? In that case, publishing might develop into competing camps, including different publishing races, competing about attention (see e.g. the IMP Journal). The invitations for cross-disciplinary inspiration that is sought via the late years' conference themes need to be followed by a true interest and a specific ambition in reviews to understand methodology, in order to develop theorizing further and not only being inspired.

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