Beyond Research Method to Research Collaboration: Research Co-production Relationships with Practitioners

Louise Young(1,2), Per Freytag (1) and Ian Wilkinson (1,3)

University of Southern Denmark, (1)

University of Western Sydney, (2)

University of Sydney, (3)

Abstract

There is ongoing debate as to whether academic research is or can be relevant to business. In this debate "relevance" usually means ensuring that the topics researched have relevance and/or that findings are communicated appropriately to non-academic communities. However, this neglects an important and often-neglected research fundamental, specifically the relationship between the researcher and the "researched". Typically, in academic research researchers dictate the terms of the research, i.e. they choose what topics to consider and to try to get funding for, the modes of investigating, and ways findings are gathered, interpreted and communicated. Drawing on a recently-published book of readings about doing research WITH managers (Freytag and Young 2017), the work of a number of the contributors is used to argue that increased value is created and greater relevance is achieved by deeper research collaboration with business and government practitioners. This involves co-producing research findings that are valuable to them and the researcher as well as to the wider community, including to the research community. To be win-win, research collaborations need to include epistemological compatibility, solid theoretical grounding and quality research practices that are geared to specific, ongoing collaborative settings. The resulting research will advance not only practice-related knowledge but also the theoretical and empirical knowledge of business academia. The ways these components can be combined and balanced is the focus of our paper.

Keywords: Research relevance, research design, collaboration, knowledge co-production, business

Introduction

There is a need for more effective connectedness between business marketing research, its researchers and the phenomena we seek to research (Stentoft and Freytag 2018). Such connectedness increases the possibilities for quality research outcomes and their implementation. There is already recognition that to be effective, research with industry and government requires the choice of mutually useful research topics and the development of closer, more meaningful relationships between business, government and its researchers (Rynes, Bartunek and Daft 2001). In addition, there needs to be greater balance among research activities, specifically the goal setting, theorizing, exploring, testing and accepting (or not) new marketing and management thought (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, Hunt 2013) within collaborative research relationships. For these processes to be effective, there needs to be a reciprocal relationship between business researchers and those they seek to study. The nature and impact of such reciprocity is considered in depth in Freytag and Young's (2017) recently-completed reference book that considers collaborative research in business and its activities.

This paper further develops the reciprocity theme and in particular argues that increased balance can be achieved in business marketing research by fundamentally changing our conceptualization of the "research" relationship between the researcher and researched and the way we undertake research activities. Specifically, we need to work collaboratively with business and government practitioners in new ways to ensure that the research produced is meaningful and relevant academically and practically. This includes ensuring that research outcomes are relevant to the wider community, including the research community. We argue that meaning and relevance can be substantially improved if these research collaborations are co-produced and of high standard. This means that not only do research collaborators need to select topics of mutual interest and value and work together to produce important findings but the research conducted also needs to include solid theoretical grounding and quality research practices that are geared to collaborative settings. This kind of research will advance not only practice-related knowledge but also the theoretical and empirical knowledge within business academia.

The design of mutually valuable, collaborative research needs to include consideration of:

- The scientific perspective(s) of the researchers and the opportunities and limitations these perspectives impose on the design and expediting of research
- The implicit and explicit processes of knowledge and theory building that the collaborators bring to their collaboration
- Available methods of information capture and analysis that enable collaboration *with* organisations' stakeholders as distinct from doing research *about* them
- Joint assessment of the quality of research processes and its output as an input to a continuing relationship.

Here we argue that mainstream business research emulating from the university sector does not in the main consider these kinds of collaborative processes as part of the research being undertaken. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, much of the research-oriented interaction sought by business and government focusses on "applied research" and/or consulting (Brennan 2004). Some of this work is undertaken by academics in Business Schools and some by commercial providers. By "consulting" we mean finding and providing information to assist specific organisations to solve particular problems. Such commercially-focussed business "research" generally is sought to enable managerial action, for example, it provides input into the design of better strategies and marketing plans or tests the probable

outcomes of alternative marketing campaigns, new products and the like. In-depth understanding of deeper processes is not sought and so research often features methods that can expedited quickly for rapid results. It is worth noting that much of this work not only doesn't contribute to business marketing theory and doesn't build enduring knowledge for practitioners, it also does not build collaborative research relationships.

Second, the increasingly micro-normative perspective of teaching in business schools and their marketing departments (Wilkinson and Young 2005) is a partial determinant of their research focus. In part this perspective emerges from student and industry preferences but nevertheless guides academic research in so far as teaching focus influences research interests. Research focus is also influenced by sources of funding (e.g. specific industry or government grants are often given to projects that look at discrete and/or short term problems). Funding is provided because there is external, i.e. government or business, interest in the area and funding criteria include researcher experience and expertise (coming in part from their teaching) (Rosenbloom and Dimitrova 2011). Therefore, much of this funded work focuses on micro-level, e.g. firm-level, management problems. There is too-often a neglect of more difficult-to-research areas such as discovery of the processes and mechanisms of business systems, the way they evolve, the way participants interact in these environments and the way public policy should be crafted to address the issues within business communities. Doing this kind of work necessitates ongoing collaborative relationships with participants that provide an environment for continuing research and allow practitioners to be "educated" in the value of more long-term, wider-perspective research such that they will participate.

Third, research topic choice also is influenced by accessibility and academic norms. Research is done in contexts and on topics using methods where data is easier to collect (Woodside 2011) and this is exacerbated by the ongoing pressures on academic researchers to publish frequently and to provide results to partners quickly. This precludes the long term orientation and time commitments that are involved with setting up and doing ongoing, in-depth, collaboratively oriented research.

Fourth, the norms that prevail at many of the more prestigious journals are directed away from the sometimes-qualitative outcomes that characterize collaborative methods and research. In many journals editors and reviewers favour reductionist approaches and this influences the methods of arms-length data collection and analysis that are chosen (Davis et al 2013). These methods produce findings that lack validity in that they solve small and often trivial problems and provide only superficial insights rather than facilitating a growth of meaningful knowledge (Woodside 2011). And they lead to outcomes that do not necessarily consider what the participants in research think about the investigations and their contributions to them.

As well as the above, there are additional reasons for considering more collaborative research design. Both business and the wider community are increasingly cynical about the value of academic research and are increasingly disinclined to participate (Ankers and Brennan 2001). Both theories of human psychology and common sense tell us that people are more likely to become involved in activities that hold meaning for them, where they feel they contribute and are valued and where they receive value from participation (Holbrook and Hirshman 1983). Research designs and methods that can foster this kind involvement are obviously most likely to be those that are collaborative.

There is a conventional scientific model sometimes characterised in marketing as the "North American school" where researchers are urged towards ever-more-rigorous methods of enquiry that produce sophisticated measurement techniques that focus on tightly defined, managerially-oriented constructs (Davis et al 2013). However, this leads to research that lacks relevance in that it is "distant"

from the stakeholders of business systems (Woodside 2011). Research is something that is "done to" customers and managers rather than knowledge being co-produced by those who participate in buying, selling and using marketing's goods and services. In line with Stentoft and Freytag (2018), we believe that this research culture is one of the drivers of the perceived irrelevance of much business school research. Business does not value these kind(s) of research. We argue that this perceived irrelevance produces an "estrangement" that also has negative consequences for the development of quality theory to inform and guide current business practice and education and future business research.

While estrangement is wide-spread in industrial marketing research, it is not universal. For many decades the IMP group has provided an eclectic range of approaches to science, used a range of methods and has produced some interesting and important work as a result. However, collaborative research needs to go further and consider not just relevant research topics and interesting methods but also more fundamental issues as to the appropriate nature of research. Instead of focussing on methods of measuring and testing researcher-defined problems, we need to consider the interplay of theorizing, exploring, testing and accepting (or not) of knowledge that is produced in collaboration with business participants. A pre-condition for doing this kind of research is the development of good quality relationships with organisations and their members, this forms the necessary foundation for co-producing knowledge through research collaboration. An example of this is the industrial PhD arrangement in Denmark and other parts of Europe. Here a PhD contract is entered into between a company and a university. The PhD project builds on a problem which is identified in the firm, but the PhD project has both to provide solution of a practical problem and to contribute to academia. The relationship continues over a number of years and can facilitate continuing connection and further collaboration.

How to build such collaborative relationships is not the focus of the remainder of this paper. Discussions of relationships in business markets and relationships between researchers and organisation have been extensively discussed elsewhere. It is at the core of the IMP research agenda and there are marketing sub-disciplines that focus upon it such as services marketing, relationship marketing and CRM. In line with our position, at the heart of much of this discussion is a process of building trust over time with cooperating organisations and forming relationships that are characterized by reciprocity and collaboration (Turnbull, Ford and Cunningham 1996).

Instead our focus is on the participants' activities within research collaboration and the way researchers can contribute to this collaboration. Therefore, we focus on the theories and models that can assist researchers in facilitating meaningful research agendas and collaborations and the methods that can be used in conjunction with these. To that end the remainder of this paper considers collaborative research opportunities in terms of the previously-mentioned elements that need to be considered as part of the collaborative process. First the way various scientific perspectives will influence collaborative research design is considered; this is followed by discussion of design and methods that correspond to different scientific stances. The paper concludes with consideration of research quality in a co-produced research setting in business marketing and ways to advance this process.

Foundational Premises of Method Choice

Articulation and justification of the methods of investigation into organisations and their processes is central to the acceptance of findings. The specific ways that this articulation is done are known as "method". Methods can focus on empirical study of some part of the world and examination of the

results of that study. Alternatively, methods can be theoretical where there is study and application of theories (Borg and Young 2017). Academic research's scientific methods differ from other methods of knowledge creation in that there are principles that guide the processes of knowledge seeking and assessing that are articulated, transparent and accessible.

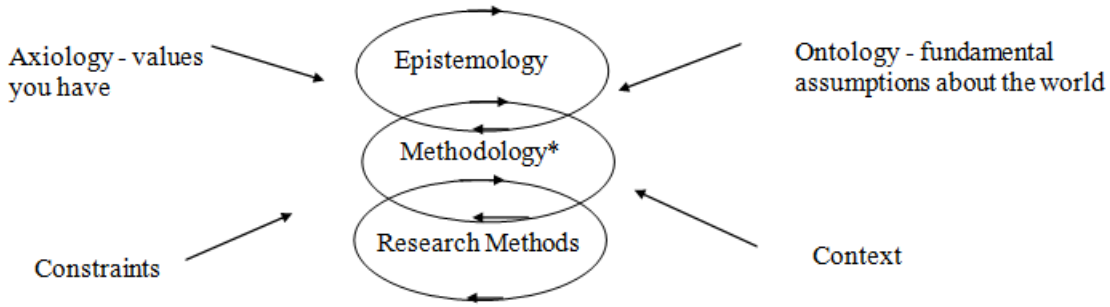
There is a growing recognition in this century of the need for a range of methods in empirical and theoretical research. This is particularly the case in the social sciences with a growing recognition that the complexities of world we seek to understand methods that address the interconnected aspects of human functioning that occur in interconnected contexts. This includes functioning in business systems. It is argued that these interconnections need to be studied together and methods that facilitate this kind of study are needed (Wilkinson and Young 2013).

It is argued that recognition of these mechanisms have eroded norms of paradigm-based research in many areas of social science (e.g. Beckman, Rasmussen and Ostergaard 2006). Instead scientific endeavour, at least in many parts of the social sciences, is characterized by what is described as "methodological pluralism". In contrast to Kuhn's (2012) view that researchers work within one paradigm – a logically consistent set of ideas with an at least somewhat defined set of appropriate methods to support it – now disciplines within social science are seen as containing multiple paradigms. Some of these are characterized by insularity of ideas and/or methods, others are nearly anarchistic (Lakatos, Feyerabend and Motterlini 1999) where "anything goes" methodologically. There is also a middle ground which sees that there are quite a few different paradigms where each has a number of accompanying methods. Such multiplicity creates uncertainty and as a result, makes it increasingly important that researchers specify their frames of reference and the underlying premises that inform their work.

Different assumptions and suppositions are embedded in different research communities and in different researchers. In business marketing for example there are at least two quite divergent schools of thought. The previously-mentioned "North American School" is more managerially oriented and focusses on the operations of particular businesses; their methods are relatively homogeneous and focus on survey and regression-based methods. An alternative group uses a more diverse set of qualitative and quantitative methods and study a wider range of business market phenomena including business relationships and networks, their evolution and the interconnections between their members – as characterized by the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) group.

One's "ultimate presumptions" (Borg and Young 2017) also called one's "research context", "ecology" and/or "paradigm" are the "starting point" from which researchers proceed into a collaboration with industry or government. As a result, it is a key factor guiding method choice(s) in which a researcher operates. Figure 1 articulates this as a continuing process. The figure shows there are a number of influencers upon the way research is conducted, i.e. the research designs and methods that are used. Method choice occurs in a wider context that includes a research participants' conscious or unconscious fundamental assumptions about the nature of world (ontology) and the values that guide our relating within that world (axiology). Method choice is also influenced by the context and constraints within which we are presently operating. This highlights that a collaborative research setting where research is co-produced will influence the choices about research method. The figure also shows that this is an evolving process. As research is produced and the researcher and the collaborating organisation evolve, the methodological design, including the specific methods used and the way there are evaluated will evolve.

Figure 1: A Research Process Framework (Easton, 1994, personal communication)



* Here means assumptions about how research should be conducted

A key mechanism in this process is the participants' epistemology, these are beliefs about what and how much can be known. This guides and refines assumptions about the nature and appropriateness of alternative research designs (labelled "methodology"). The methodology's assumptions are concerned with ideas about how research should be conducted including: the way tasks should be undertaken, the order in which this should occur, how emerging findings should inform the methodology of continuing research, and the ways the appropriateness of various methods of information capture should be evaluated.

The methodology's assumptions influences and is influenced by one's epistemology. It is also influenced by the information collection methods used and the nature of the experiences and outputs the methods provide. As already noted, the process is an evolving one. As research methods are chosen and used these experiences influence the assumptions made about how research should be conducted. Future method choices will be based on research successes and failures; we have evolving beliefs as to what can be known and assumptions about various methods' efficacy and these will continue to be influenced by evolving environmental contexts and constraints (not shown in Figure 1).

Within one's beliefs as to what can be known (epistemology) are beliefs as to the nature of the reality and how much we, as researchers, can come to "know" that reality through our investigations. Researchers differ in their beliefs as to whether there is an independent, "objective" reality. Some believe that reality is partially or entirely socially constructed, i.e. it is a product of our imagination and interpretations. These researchers believe that reality exists only in our minds, "research" is concerned with ascertaining the nature of what we have perceived; thus methods that facilitate uncovering these perceptions and the ways they have been formed are sought. Others believe there is an objective reality and there is also a socially constructed one although among these researchers there are different views on the nature of the interactions between these "realities" and the relative importance of researching each. These specific beliefs again will influence the methods chosen are they ways they are co-mingled.

In developing a research partnership, it is important to seek compatibility or synergy in the foundational premises. Practitioners may not conceptualize their foundational premises in the same terms of academics but they have theories of the world which shape and are shaped by their investigations and reflections and influence their beliefs about information and method quality (Schön 1983). Research partners' foundational premises need not be identical; rather there needs to be an alignment of expectations as to what will be explored and can be discovered.

Method Choice and Foundational Premises

In academic research method choice is influenced by the ways a researcher believes that objective reality can be "known" or discovered by them. Some researchers seek methods that allow them to differentiate their discoveries about the world in terms of whether they are more or less "true", i.e. closer to or more distant from (objective) reality, e.g. they assign probabilities or speculate as to the degree particular facts are unknowable. Researchers differ in their beliefs as to the "organization" of objective reality. Some believe reality is reducible, i.e. one can study parts of reality and understand it by combining the insights that come from studying parts of it. Others believe it is the interconnections between those parts of reality that are central to deriving understanding and meaning and therefore parts of reality cannot necessarily be studied in isolation. These beliefs also substantially impact on the choice of research methods.

Table 1 summarizes the way these ideas combine into four indicative (of many) epistemological stances.

Table 1 differentiates views about knowing reality according to whether they are more objective and rational or more subjective and relative. The beliefs of the more objectivistic-rationalistic or *realistic* stances are displayed in the table's left columns. Positivists and Realists believe that the world exists independently of researchers. Research is concerned with detecting and explaining this reality. Positivists' research breaks reality into parts and researches these separately. The extent to which the research has uncovered objective reality, i.e. is "true", can be inferred by the results of tests, e.g. statistical tests or experimental results, that are run on those parts. This means "truth" is at least somewhat knowable. The overarching nature of reality is inferred from the (re)combination of the parts that have been researched separately. This belief system allows, for example, "variables" in questionnaires to be combined into multi-item constructs and for co-variance of these to investigated in ways that show the ways they influence each other. In contrast, realists believe reality is complex and interconnected, it is difficult to know and we cannot know the extent to which our research has approached discovery of that reality, i.e. there is no way to verify the "truth" of findings. However, descriptions and theories about the reality being researched nevertheless bring useful insights.

As already noted, interpretative approaches are quite different. These do not see reality as something which out "there", but rather as something which exists in the "mind" of the researcher. Researchers construct their reality using a range of sources. For some research and researchers focus is on introspection and interpretation of personal experiences and/or past research. Alternatively or additionally, research can include investigations into others' current ideas and behaviours.

Irrespective of the focus, it is important to recognize that investigations are being interpreted within a researcher's own experiences and existing ideas. In collaborative research partnerships, this process of interpretation becomes more complex because a range of partners are involved. However, because investigations continue in a deepening relationship, all stakeholders can continue to develop and co-develop their ideas about the world. This in turn impacts on their unfolding investigations. To enable this process, the methods used need to allow researchers need to get close to the contexts and/or actors that they are researching such that they can more closely observe themselves and others and can better co-construct interpretations.

Table 1: Differentiating Epistemological Stances

	Positivism	Realism	Conventionalism	Constructivism
Orientation	Objective	Objective	Interpretative-Objective	Interpretative
Knowing and Reality	One can find the truth; i.e. there is an objective truth to find;	There is a reality out there to be discovered. The truth of finding is important but it is not possible to know whether we have succeeded in understanding reality.	What is accepted to be true is knowledge. Truth is socially constructed from the collective knowledge of previous research and extended by combining this with further research.	Reality is socially constructed. Researchers work to build better interpretations of reality by participating in the reality they seek to understand.
Nature of reality and truth	The truth is divisible into knowable parts.	Reality is complex and richly connected	Knowing what others think is central to interpreting what one's view of reality is	Each researcher's interpretation of reality is unique and based on their experiences. Thus there are as many "truths" as truth seekers (i.e. researchers)
Relationship between researcher and subject	Distance is sought to avoid influencing subjects or research settings	Distance and closeness are "traded off" in an attempt to control and understand impacts on research but also allow greater validity	Distance is sacrified when required to enable sufficient quality information to be gathered	Closeness is goal as this is means by which information are heart of interpretation is gathered.
Assumptions about and methods used for studying reality (in social systems)	Experiments and surveys are used. Samples representing wider populations are measured and with statistical inference used to generalize. Reality is abstracted by constructing variables to test separate theories It assumed that measures can be made value free, and objective	Use methods that consider systems as a whole and focus on understanding of their complex connections, i.e. case studies, network analysis and simulations. Also multiple methods (which may include surveys or experiments) are used to capture different aspects of reality. Extrapolation of findings may be possible.	Social construction of reality should include understanding of other researchers' social construction. Studying others' studies and positioning ones own interpretations relative to these is central	Methods that allow researchers to get close as possible to the reality they are constructing are used. Articulating the way interpretations are built and developed are a central part of the research.

In line with this discussion, the last row of Table 1 indicates that different epistemological stances strongly influence the methods researchers use. To enable reducibility and allow research to be generalized, positivists use often use standardised questions that can be translated to numbers and function to summarize the patterns of answers via statistics. A key goal is to avoid influencing what is studied. Therefore the researcher must be detached from what and who is being researched.

The realists' more "complicated" view of reality means that these methods are not appropriate and instead they use methods that allow them to make sense of the ecology of interconnections that are the focus of their research. Case studies, simulations and/or network analyses are methods that are often used. This means that it is often necessary to make a trade-off between the closeness needed to study an issue or particular actors and the loss of objectivity and ability to evaluate the nature of reality that this entails. To minimize these issues multiple methods are often part of the research design (Marroun and Young 2017).

For interpretivists, observation of and reflection on behaviours and ideas of themselves and others are used to make sense of and construct reality. Evaluation of method effectiveness is based on the understanding that it is generated about a particular actor(s) in a certain setting. "The aim is to understand and explain why people (actors) have different experiences, rather than search for external causes and fundamental laws to explain their behaviour" (Carson et al 2001 p.7). The observations and reflection that characterise this kind of investigation are sometimes extended with researchers using methods that engineer or construct situations that produce further insights. Methods such as observation and quasi experimentation (Marroun and Young 2017), action learning (Haug 2017), workshops (Storvang, Mortensen and Clarke 2017), drawing (Evers, Marroun and Young 2016), role play acting (Larsen and Friis 2017) and game playing (Burr 2017) can be used to augment questioning and observation as these may enhance communication and provide a deeper understanding of one's own and others' sense-making processes and constructions of reality.

The Impact of Research Stance on Research Outcomes and Knowledge Co-creation

The proceeding discussion confirms the necessity of articulating one's research stance while designing, conducting and reporting research findings. Sometimes the epistemological stance's assumptions are part of a paradigm which includes interconnected theory and method. For example, in much of marketing's managerially-focussed research, positivism is dominant. Included are assumptions about the reducible nature of the reality being researched and these guide decisions about the appropriate ways to do this. This ecology of assumptions can influence the conclusions researchers do and do not draw. This is particularly problematic because the nature of these assumptions more often than not is not articulated and their appropriateness is not examined. In a more interpretative environment similar issues can exist. Both the history of the social construction that has guided the research and the processes of interpretation may not be reported.

In co-producing research with practitioners, awareness of foundational assumptions remains central. They exist in all research participants though they may not have been articulated or consciously considered. Given that the backgrounds of the researcher and who or what is being researched will be substantially different, it is useful to explore notions of what can be known and how it can be best explored. The co-production of this shared understanding can provide an important platform for building meaningful research. Table 2 indicates the importance of shared understanding in co-produced research. The table articulates relational properties of the collaborative mode, these are embedded in descriptions of mutuality of interest, the understanding and adaption needed to address

its context specificity, multiplicity and ambiguity of roles, high involvement, joint problem solving and sharing.

Table 2: Modes of research designs – traditional and collaborative

	Traditional research mode	Collaborative research mode
Motivation for research/ Company access	Based on researchers interests and ability to provide (specific) solutions	Based on mutual interests and ability to provide ongoing knowledge assets
Research questions	Theoretical driven (gaps)	Empirical driven based on mutual interests (gaps of both theoretical and practical relevance)
Research goal	Reduce research biases, seek truth	Foster collaboration, seek understanding and common interest
Research methodology and design	Based on indicative or deductive logics	Based in a particular context, theoretical informed and abductive logic
Role of actors (i.e. managers & researchers)	Arms-length approach (researchers as outsider and manager as (passive) informant)	Researchers as observer and participant/participant. Managers and other participants as co-creators of knowledge
Research methods	Choice and use based on research design	Choice and use based on empirical setting
Ethics	Aim for detachment	High involvement
Theory	Framing understandings and contributing to closing gaps	Identify gaps and solve problem in theory and practice
Coding & analysis	Researcher driven	Collaboration driven (i.e. can validate interpretations)
Results: Theory	Theory in its own right (more general theories)	More applicable theories
Results: Implications for management	Often very general, seeking to find "real world" relevance	More useful and includes specific problem solutions and well as general understanding

The table highlights a range of domains in which co-production of knowledge can occur. This goes beyond providing data in research using pre-designed instruments to elicit answers to researchers' questions and beyond participant-observation and ethnographic practices. In the latter the researcher is the collector of information and the research subject the provider. The collaborative co-production of knowledge changes this relationship between the research participants. The researcher may well act as a guide who facilitates and manages the processes of research that are occurring on an ongoing basis as this is their area of expertise and is often the key asset they bring to the collaboration. But the business and government stakeholders also can become researchers –assisting in the directing of research inquiry including the theorizing (as per Schön 1983), designing, information collecting, analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings.

Conclusions and Implications

For many decades the IMP group has studied networks and relationships and has contributed important understanding of this to the academic community. However, they have neglected to study their own (and other business marketing researchers') place and role in these networks. This is an increasingly concerning over-sight. In the information age, those who design enquiries, gather information and make sense of it are poised to play an ever-more-important role. Business researchers are actors in the business ecology and have the potential to contribute more of their resources (skills and expertise), activity (management of continuing research programmes) and schema (their theoretical insights) to industry and government as they work to combine these with the resources, activities and ideas within organisations and their communities.

The IMP group is particularly well-placed to do this. They have a long history of seeking to understand the processes and mechanisms of business and using research tools that allow them deeper understanding of these. This does suggest that these kinds of methods are likely to be conducive to quality knowledge co-production. Improved research will include improved methods of planning, information gathering, analysis, interpretation and evaluation of research quality (Welch 2017). And it is the case that the qualitative methods which allow ongoing improvisation and adaption (and characterize much of the IMP research) will suit the complex ecology of interactions that is likely to characterize this environment. However, research co-production does not preclude use of more structured, quantitative tools. Questionnaires can be collaboratively designed and administered; simulations tested by practitioner users. Models can be interpreted and fine-tuned collectively. Valuable synergies from combining more and less structured methods will continue to be available (Wilkinson and Young 2013).

The IMP group focuses on the way business market relationships and networks do (and do not) grow and evolve to enable effective business processes and structures. Practitioner-academic co-production of knowledge in the ways described here adds an important component to considerations of business network processes. These will change, as well the network structures in which they occur. Systematic research into research practices is needed to determine the way effective and ineffective research partnerships unfold and the ways benefits and liabilities flow.

In IMP and beyond, changes in the mind sets of at least some researchers and practitioners will be needed if they are to move from traditional research designs to co-production. Their relationship will be changed from researchers as knowledge producers and practitioners as consumers of that knowledge to one where practitioners become more research-competent and researchers shift from their position of authority to a more consensual, reciprocal and equal relationship. This will not be to everyone's taste. Neither academics nor organisations may wish to give up their current bases of power nor may they wish to invest the time and energy that this transformation will involve. There are discrepancies of time, place, information and assortment between business and academia to overcome (Alderson in Wilkinson and Gray 2007) that may require a kind of skill and effort that cannot be acquired. The current norms of business and academic cultures that exist in some contexts may mean that the necessary mutual respect needed to build a collaborative relationship is lacking and cannot be developed.

However, the potential benefits are substantial. Many of the problems we see in contemporary business marketing research can be at least partially addressed by co-produced enquiries with different perspectives; this can enable insight and change (Young and Freeman 2008). The contribution and quality of research can be evaluated more thoroughly as it will occur in more contexts with more heterogeneity of evaluation. More accurate assessment of the generalizability of

findings and the ways these can be appropriately extrapolated is likely for the same reason. A research context of continuing co-production of knowledge may reverse the trend of increasingly small increments to knowledge based on their "research-ability" and the worrying lack of theoretical development that we increasingly see (Yadav 2010). Instead there is the possibility to research big problems and big phenomena. There will likely be fresh perspectives from practitioners that can shine light on and question conventional wisdom rather than contra-findings being explained away, inconvenient theoretical and empirical relationships being ignored and alternative ways of investigating phenomena being dismissed as often occurs at present[1].

In arguing for co-production of research, we are not seeking to hijack the research agenda, i.e. we do not assume that ours are the best methods or that there are better or lesser scientific stances or methods for collaborative research. All methods have strengths and limitations. Co-produced research may change the relative value of methods but value will almost certainly remain context-specific. *Prima facia*, co-production does not exclude any methods. In line with Anderson (1983 p. 25) we argue that a "sole means of theory justification cannot be maintained as a viable description of the scientific process or as a normative prescription for the conduct of scientific activities". All methods' value remains grounded in the scientific stance from which they are applied as well as being grounded in the research environment in which they are being used. In business marketing research there is considerable diversity of stance, therefore there are a range of exciting possibilities for researchers and practitioners who chose to explore this approach to research.

[1] A discussion of this is in a portfolio of six papers in the *Australasian Marketing Journal* (Issue 3, 2011) that consider the development of market orientation theory by Rong and Wilkinson (2011). Their findings show that performance influences market orientation as much or more than market orientation influences performance. This was fiercely contested by market orientation researchers even though their tests have been correlational. However because this is at the core of a powerful paradigm, it is perceived to be "true" and could not be challenged despite there being no definitive evidence.

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