

An impact-oriented implementation approach in business marketing research

Introduction to the Special Issue on “Implementing Strategies and Theories of B2B Marketing and Sales Management”



Kristian Möller ^{a,*}, Petri Parvinen ^{b,1}

^a Aalto University, Department of Marketing, P.O. Box 21230, FIN-00076 Aalto, Finland

^b University of Helsinki, P.O. Box 62, FI-00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 February 2014
Received in revised form 20 May 2014
Accepted 10 September 2014
Available online 17 March 2015

Keywords:

Marketing management
Marketing implementation
Business marketing
Sales management
Strategic marketing

ABSTRACT

There are serious concerns about the theory–practice gap in the research on business marketing. One of the key aspects is the relevance and implementability of the results. The overarching objective of this special issue of “From Strategy Frameworks to Value-in-use: Implementing Strategies and Theories of B2B Marketing and Sales Management” is to enhance understanding of managerial implementation. We have four goals in this introductory article. First, we discuss implementation as a concept, given the varying views and the considerable ambiguity. Second, we identify and analyze aspects that influence the potential for carrying out managerially relevant research and challenge the implementation process. As a result we propose an implementation framework for use in our third task: to introduce the articles in this special issue. We conclude by presenting an agenda for enhancing the managerial relevance of future business-marketing research.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“There is an alarming and growing gap between the interests, standards, and priorities of academic marketers and the needs of marketing executives operating in an ambiguous, uncertain, fast-changing, and complex marketplace.”

[(Reibstein, Day, & Wind, 2009)]

1. Introduction

Marketing is a paradoxical discipline; it is simultaneously seen as overtly empirically driven and wanting in advanced theory construction (Möller, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2010; Yadav, 2010), and is criticized for lacking in practical implementation and thus being poor in managerial relevance (Gummesson, 2002; Piercy, 2002). This kind of tension is typical in most applied fields; there are always scholars who pursue new knowledge for its own sake and researchers who want to excel in producing relatively rapidly implementable results. However, in spite of calls to combine scientific “rigor” and

managerial or social “relevance” (Brennan, 2004; Varadarajan, 2003), and efforts to develop joint research agendas among academics and practitioners (Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010), there are serious concerns that the theory–practice gap is actually growing wider (Reibstein et al., 2009). This is alarming given that without at least long-term implementability business-marketing research – and researchers – will lose their credibility.

The overarching goal of this special issue of “Implementing Strategies and Theories of B2B Marketing and Sales Management” in *Industrial Marketing Management* is to respond to the need for information on managerial implementation, thereby enhancing the relevance of research on business marketing, and especially sales management, which has been rising in prominence (LaPlaca, 2013). We are sincerely grateful to Peter LaPlaca, the Editor-in-Chief of the IMM, for his invaluable support in producing this special issue. We have four goals in this introductory article. First, we aim to shed light on the concept of implementation, and to ease the confusion and ambiguity that surround it. Second, we identify and analyze aspects that influence the potential for carrying out managerially relevant research and challenge the implementation process. We use the resulting framework in our third task: to introduce the articles comprising this special issue. Finally, we draw up an agenda for enhancing the managerial relevance of business marketing in the future. The paper proceeds in accordance with the above-mentioned goals.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +358 50 3836190.

E-mail addresses: kristian.moller@aalto.fi (K. Möller), petri.parvinen@helsinki.fi (P. Parvinen).

¹ Tel.: +358 50 526 4661.

2. The many facets of implementation

2.1. Implementation in marketing research

What do we mean when we speak of implementation in marketing research? Let us give a brief historical review. The significance of implementation as a determinant of successful management research was highlighted in the 1980s. This interest was based on the strong expansion of strategic planning in the 1970s. Numerous large corporations invested in headquarter-led strategizing and corporation- and business-group-level schemes, inviting researchers to participate in and evaluate them (Buzzell, 2004). Companies with explicit implementation programs enjoyed better results from their planning efforts (Barney, 1991; Buzzell & Gale, 1987).

The key message was that marketing strategies only resulted in superior returns when they were implemented successfully (Bonoma, 1984). This led to the first wave of literature questioning the balance between theorizing, marketing models and planning, and implementation, and there were calls for more attention to managerial relevance and execution (e.g., Bonoma, 1984; Bonoma & Crittenden, 1988). From the end of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s researchers became increasingly interested in the inability of the marketing function to execute, and especially evaluate the performance of various marketing investments, ranging from advertising effectiveness to new product development and organizational change (Webster, 1981). The high investments required called for better tools for improving the implementation and pre-analyzing the potential performance effects of alternative marketing plans and activities (Lilien & Kotler, 1983).

Failed marketing implementation was used as an example of strategic weakness in execution. This development resulted in a few articles theorizing marketing implementation and providing guidelines (see especially Noble & Mokwa, 1999; Noble, 1999), but unfortunately these remained isolated efforts.

By the early 2000s the focus of academic marketing had progressed to establishing a quantitative understanding of the fit between business strategy, marketing strategy, and dimensions of market orientation and performance, with relatively little consideration of actual implementation (Thorpe & Morgan, 2007; Vorhies & Morgan, 2003). This trend, driven by the overwhelming success of the market-orientation school, later marketing strategy, and enabled by the dominant role of SEM methodology, did not generally produce managerially interesting results. The derived propositions tended to be too general, based mainly on extensive cross-industry samples, or too self-evident or abstract (Piercy, 2002). A good exemplar and synthesis of this research orientation is provided by Slater, Hult, and Olson (2010), who address the factors influencing the relative importance of creativity in drawing up a marketing strategy and effectiveness in its implementation. On the other hand, there was increasing evidence that corporate success was strongly associated with an ability to execute flawlessly (Joyce, Nohria, & Roberson, 2003).

2.2. Business marketing and implementation

Although the research on business marketing shares many of the briefly sketched features of studies on marketing strategy and corporate performance, it offers a considerably richer insight into marketing implementation (Woodside, Pattinson, and Montgomery (2012b) give an excellent overview of implementation in business marketing). Managerial interest is represented in the business-marketing themes listed below (the list is by no means exhaustive, and the themes have been chosen to suit the purposes of this special issue; for a description of dominant research topics in business marketing see LaPlaca, 2013; Pels, Möller, & Saren, 2009):

- Customer relationship management (CRM) systems and their implementation

- Key account management (KAM) systems and their implementation
- The marketing and selling of complex systems – “systems business and project business”
- Relational selling programs and practices
- Value-based selling

The selected themes represent programmatically constructed solutions for the management of business customer relationships, and especially sales. There are a number of relevant differences in terms of managerial implementation, however. We briefly discuss the first three research domains, the last two being addressed in the articles comprising this special issue.

Customer relationship management emerged in the mid-1980s, driven by rapidly developing information technology. Primarily constituting practice-based and consultant-driven activities and tools for managing customer relationships through databases and direct-marketing activities, CRM quickly attracted academic attention as an integral part of the emerging relationship-marketing orientation (Boulding, Staelin, Ehret, & Johnston, 2005). Helped by the Internet and mobile technology, marketers found additional opportunities to customize their offerings and messages (Kumar, Ramani, & Bohling, 2004).

Two interrelated but distinctive views are discernible in research on the implementation of CRM programs and practices. In its simpler form CRM is regarded as a tool set for optimizing a firm's customer equity and the customer's lifetime value through customer relationships and portfolio management (Malthouse & Blattberg, 2005). The managerial goals are to enhance marketing efficiency by the better targeting of marketing activities, especially communications, and to achieve high levels of customer retention and market share (Rust, Lemon, & Zeithaml, 2004). It was soon recognized, however, that the effective implementation of CRM involved not only tools and related capabilities, but also inter-functional cooperation and the adoption of a customer-oriented or relationship-marketing-driven culture (Boulding et al., 2005; Gummesson, 1998). Bohling et al. (2006), for example, suggest that the effective implementation of CRM presumes coordination in the management of the product portfolio, customers and promotion, operations, and accounting systems. We suggest that an in-depth understanding of this complex process requires case or action research and the adoption of a multi-disciplinary perspective.

Key account management (KAM) has its origins in the 1970s when large US companies such as IBM and Xerox started to refer to their major national-level customers as key accounts, and to offer them dedicated sales persons and teams. Academics became interested in this marketing innovation in the late 1970s and early 1980s when Stevenson and Page (1979), Stevenson (1980), and Shapiro and Moriarty (1982) investigated issues related to the adoption and implementation of key account practices. Since then various aspects of KAM adoption and execution have been examined in numerous studies that also offer suggestions on its implementation (see e.g., Abratt & Kelly, 2002; Ivens & Pardo, 2008). Following the early emphasis on selling practices the more recent interest has focused on the relationship-marketing aspects of KAM, and on organizational issues in the globalizing economy (Wengler, Ehret, & Saab, 2006).

In spite of these considerable research efforts, current understanding of the successful implementation of KAM is still relatively limited. There are several reasons for this. Adopting KAM is a complex organizational and cultural process that is sensitive to the business field and company-level factors. As a result, recommendations based on cross-sectional studies tend to be too general and ‘mean-based’ to have significant managerial value. Given their strategic, international, and organizational dimensions, major KAM programs such as CRM would benefit from multidisciplinary research approaches (Guesalaga & Johnston, 2010). Homburg, Workman, and Jensen's (2002) configurational study represents a significant attempt to examine the variation in real-life KAM applications: the authors identified eight

distinct approaches and recognized considerable differences in their effectiveness.

Research on *the marketing and selling of complex systems*, also often covering so-called project business, is much more limited than the extensive investigations into CRM and KAM practices. We wanted to include this domain, however, given its relevance especially in international business marketing. As the label indicates, systems business includes the construction, marketing and selling, and buying of integrated solutions, which contain hardware components, various software and a number of services ranging from installation, user education, maintenance and repair to financing (Helander & Möller, 2007). Given that the process of ordering and delivering complex systems, such as industrial installations, machinery, and software systems, is both rare and time-consuming, it is generally carried out through multi-party projects. Bridging the theory-to-practice gap in value-based solution selling has been documented as a key research avenue (Töytäri, Alejandro, Parvinen, Ollila, & Rosendahl, 2011). The project aspects of systems business is examined within the field of project business studies in Wikström, Hellström, Artto, Kujala, and Kujala (2009).

Key issues in the academic research include the analytical description of processes employed in carrying out systems business/project business, the various roles and functions of the actors, the organizational modes utilized, and the strategies employed (Cova & Salle, 2007; Helander & Möller, 2008; Jalkala, Cova, Salle, & Salminen, 2010). More recently, attention has turned to the role of services in systems business, and the role of business models and their transformation (Kujala, Artto, Aaltonen, & Turkulainen, 2010; Wikström, Artto, Kujala, & Söderlund, 2010).

Most of the research on systems business is empirical. The focus has been on understanding the elements and processes constituting complex supplier–customer interaction, and especially supplier roles and strategies. Because of the complexity and multidimensionality of the business, researchers have tended to engage in case research. This has produced a number of useful frameworks and managerial guidelines, but has not thus far yielded any systematic propositions for their implementation, nor has it been reported in top-tier journals.

2.3. Facets of implementation – classification

In the above sections we highlight a selection of business-marketing studies emphasizing managerial practices and their implementation. The question of what implementation is still remains unanswered, however. Several dictionaries define it as putting something into effect – “the act of implementing – providing a practical means for accomplishing something” (Dictionaries, 2010), “The process of putting a decision or plan into effect; execution” (Princeton WordNet; Merriam-Webster Inc., 2004). The academic perspective on the managerial implementation of research is more eclectic, however. Noble (1999) lists several views in his seminal article concerning research on strategy implementation, and discusses them as follows (Noble, 1999, 119–120):

“The range of views put forth is considerable. One approach (e.g., Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1984) holds implementation to be an act of monitoring and controlling interventions.” Another common view (e.g., Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Kotler, 1984) treats implementation as synonymous with execution of the strategic plan. This view is limited in that it fails to acknowledge the emergent nature of many implementation processes... Finally, several authors (e.g., Cespedes, 1991; Laffan, 1983) view implementation as a finer level of planning involving the allocation of resources and the resolution of operational issues.”

All these definitions pertain to the actual implementation of marketing or strategic plans, programs or systems, as in the case of CRM and KAM, and potential new organizational modes. The research literature reviewed above uses the term implementation in a much broader and

looser sense, however. Given its significance for the future relevance of research on business marketing (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2012), there is clearly a need for a better conceptualization.

We believe that the discussion about the economic, managerial and societal relevance of research in the areas of business marketing and sales management regularly confuses four different categories of research implementation: 1) the managerial implications of academic research, 2) theories or research-based propositions/programs/tools for intended use in business organizations, 3) research into the processes and effects of implementation, and 4) direct intervention or action research targeting specific implementations.

- (1) The first category, *the managerial implications of academic research*, referring to the typical managerial-conclusions or outcomes section in academic research papers, is probably the most common mode of ‘implementation’ (see e.g., Matikainen et al., 2015; and Wengler et al., 2006). Its direct impact on business-marketing practice is almost certainly close to zero. However, if the propositions are well communicated and managerially provoking, as in the early research on relationship marketing and business models, they could have major managerial or societal relevance through their indirect influence. This is the case when the results initiate a wave of new research and spread to the management community through consultation and executive-education activities (Mol & Birkinshaw, 2009; Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2000; Scarbrough, 2002).
- (2) *Theories or research-based propositions/programs/tools for organizations/management* cover academic research that directly purports to create managerially relevant and relatively directly applicable propositions. These range from procedural guidelines on “how to construct or carry out an implementation program” (see e.g., how to construct a strategic business network in Partanen & Möller, 2012) and how to establish/improve a KAM organization (see Guenzi & Storbacka, 2015–this issue) to relatively detailed models, action plans, and tool-kit-type propositions (Rust et al., 2004; Rust, Zahorik, & Keiningham, 1995). Generally this kind of work is based either on case material or on the utilization of more extensive field data. Even though such propositions are constructed with a view to being implemented, we believe that their real utilization again depends on their perceived attractiveness to consultants and management educators. The researchers themselves can obviously play an active role in this diffusion process by packaging their suggestions in a managerially accessible form (see e.g., “Driving Customer Equity” by Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2001).
- (3) *Research into the processes and effects of implementation* covers the, unfortunately limited, efforts focusing directly on managerial implementation. They include theorizing on the concept, and especially empirical studies on the drivers, contexts, processes, organization, actors, and effects of various implementation endeavors (see e.g., Noble & Mokwa, 1999). In this special issue, Guenzi and Storbacka’s (2015) study on how to establish/improve a KAM organization and Artto, Valtakoski and Kärki’s (2015) investigation into how project-based firms integrate project and service businesses exemplify this category of implementation studies. Theorizing, although feasible, is rare in marketing (see Noble, 1999 for an exception) but more common in areas such as policy studies, information processing, and health services (for an interesting example of the last-mentioned, see Damschroder et al., 2009).
- (4) *Direct intervention or action research targeting specific implementations* is very rare in the research on business marketing. It may be carried out, but remains unpublished for proprietary reasons or because it is not considered academic enough for most marketing journals. An action-research study reporting a project aimed at constructing an efficient delivery system for

complex ICT services illustrates the potential of this approach (Hyötyläinen & Möller, 2007; Hyötyläinen, 2010). Action, or participatory research (the researcher collaborates with one or several business and other organizations) is much more common in the creation and implementation of information technology applications (see e.g., Lau, 1997; Peffers, Tuunanen, Rothenberger, & Chatterjee, 2007). It is evident that action research would offer considerable potential for bridging the research-practice gap but it presumes a change in the academic valuing system and in researcher education, which are not minor challenges.

We contend that the above classification of the types or modes of implementation in the case of academic research offers a more comprehensive view of implementation than the narrow “executing or putting into effect” definition. All modes are relevant, but they differ considerably in several respects. How direct or indirect is the application potential a particular study offers? How general or case-specific are the suggestions (tools, programs, systems, organizational or behavioral changes)? How much researcher-practitioner collaboration is called for? The implementation modes and their characteristics are further illustrated in the articles included in this special issue. First, however, we present a number of dimensions concerning the target phenomenon and construct an implementation framework, which we then use to position the articles and discuss their respective merits.

3. Complexity – toward a theory of implementation

The above discussion emphasizes the challenges involved in managerial implementation. We suggest that the degree of complexity of what is to be implemented, in other words the organizational and managerial improvements in question, has a direct impact on how it is done. Such improvements may relate to business processes, managerial or salesperson behavior, and organizational or management systems, and affect how the implementation is carried out and how it should be researched. In brief, the complexity of the focal phenomenon influences managerial decisions and practices, as well as the choice of research method.

3.1. Drivers of complexity

Complexity is an extensive concept that is addressed in several disciplines. In this context we cannot offer a fully-fledged discussion, but draw from our own work within business and relational marketing (Möller & Wilson, 1995; Möller & Halinen, 2000; Lamberg & Parvinen, 2003; Töytäri et al., 2011; Peltokorpi, Alho, Kujala, Aitamurto, & Parvinen, 2008; Möller, 2013). The Business Dictionary (BusinessDictionary.com) provides a useful starting definition of complexity in organizational contexts:

“Organizational complexity: Condition of having many diverse and autonomous but interrelated and interdependent components or parts linked through many (dense) interconnections. In the context of an organization, complexity is associated with (1) interrelationships of the individuals, (2) their effect on the organization, and (3) the organization’s interrelationships with its external environment. How these interrelationships arise and how they enable the organization to evolve (by creating new organizational patterns and structures), is not well understood.”

It is clear from the above that complexity is a tricky issue to capture. One of the basic problems is that all dimensions influencing the complexity of a specific phenomenon, such as an organization, seem to be interrelated. Here we restrict our attention to the following six

interrelated factors, which we see as the main drivers of implementation complexity in business marketing.

1. *The inherent complexity of the implementation object/target* (e.g., a tool set, an organizational innovation, a management system innovation): This refers to (i) the number of constitutive components or elements, (ii) the type and level of technical expertise required, and (iii) the type and level of managerial expertise required. There may be significant differences in inherent complexity among various implementation objects such as a new business model, a KAM system, and the installation of an automatized sales system. The ‘higher’ the listed characteristics the higher the inherent complexity.
2. *The innovativeness or newness of the implementation*: In the case of novel technological or organizational innovations there is limited codified knowledge that can be used as guiding principles, which makes the implementation process more of a trial-and-error exercise. Available knowledge also limits the number of available and effective research approaches. Newness may also be relative, varying between newness-to-the world and newness to the implementing organization. In the latter case information is available from companies that have already implemented the innovation. Combining the level of novelty and the extent or systemic quality of the target phenomenon allows distinction between *radical versus incremental innovativeness*, the former being far more complex and challenging in terms of successful research and implementation.
3. *Interactional complexity*: Business/management implementations vary widely in how much interpersonal and inter-organizational cooperation is required in their construction and execution. This characteristic is clearly related to the inherent complexity of the implementation target. The more experts from different intra-organizational departments and external organizations that are required, the higher is the interactional complexity in terms of both organizing the implementation and studying the phenomenon.
4. *Uniqueness versus repetitiveness*: Major strategic endeavors such as radical change in business models and the related organizational reformation are almost one-of-the-kind events compared to the implementation of widely available IT-enabled sales-support systems that are upgraded reasonably frequently, for example. A high level of uniqueness significantly increases the uncertainty and makes the probability or degree of success very hard to estimate. Investing in learning may be futile, and lessons learnt during the implementation are unlikely to be useful afterwards. Such situations call for collaborative multiparty actions among managers, consultants and researchers.
5. *The level of embeddedness*: This refers to the extent to which the implementation phenomenon can be understood without understanding its contextual and historical background. For example, it may be very difficult to import managerial systems from very different cultural settings. The difficulties involved in trying to implement the Japanese Kanban systems in US manufacturing companies illustrate this point (Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000). Given that all phenomena are inherently embedded, it is a question of the extent to which this should be taken into account in studying and implementing the target phenomenon. In other words, how risky are reductionist approaches that are prevalent in most quantitatively oriented research? For a more extensive discussion on embeddedness and layers in business marketing, see Chandler and Vargo (2011), Halinen and Törnroos (1998), Möller (2013), Möller, Pels, and Saren (2009), and Wilke and Ritter (2006).
6. *The pace of change of the implementation object*: High-speed phenomena such as the development of mobile marketing methods and the use social media are difficult to capture by means of traditional research methods. This calls for more extensive utilization of the Internet and other research methods based on digital data.

All the above drivers of complexity refer to the object or target of the implementation. A significant additional factor is the nature of the business and industrial context in which it takes place. For example, one could install seemingly similar KAM system applications in a company

producing standard electronic components as in a firm operating in mobile infrastructure networks. Both contexts are relatively well established and evolve incrementally or in technological generations, but differ remarkably in their complexity and scale of customership. The latter arguably involves much higher implementation complexity, but given that the influence of the business context on the complexity can be examined with the help of the proposed drivers it is not discussed further here. In any case, on the theoretical level the embeddedness dimension covers the business context.

3.2. Implementation space

As the previous section indicates, there is great variety in the relative complexity of implementation domains and cases. We argue that the proposed drivers are essential in facilitating understanding of the required outcomes of managerial implementation decisions and practices and the choice of research methods for addressing them. Although detailed and theoretically rigorous, the six-driver solution does not work well for presentational purposes. By collapsing the six drivers into a continuum of implementation complexity and combining this with three commonly utilized managerial layers (strategic, operational, and functional management) we arrive at our proposed ‘research implementation space’ framework, illustrated in Fig. 1. The managerial levels are drawn from Raynor (2007, 107–108): functional management concerns optimizing daily operations and processes, operational management deals with executing existing strategies, and strategic management focuses on business uncertainty and constructing future-oriented strategies. Illustrative examples are positioned in the implementation space.

The Research Implementation Space (RIS) framework supports several conclusions. These are discussed only briefly here as the framework is a synthesis of the drivers of implementation complexity (Section 3.1.) and is further utilized for positioning the articles in this special issue.

Let us first consider the low–moderate complexity part of the space. Most mainstream research in business marketing either addresses issues of low or moderate complexity or makes such assumptions about focal application domains such as KAM systems and CRM. Concentration on understanding and analyzing dependency between

antecedents, key issues, and outcomes of various marketing success factors has enabled the utilization of structural equation modeling. This, we believe, is one of the underlying reasons for considering even relatively complex issues (e.g., CMR and KAM applications) through strongly reductionist lenses. The prime aim in this prevalent method is to address the ‘why question’: why there are specific antecedent effects in the outcome variables. Although the approach takes some contextuality into account through the examination of postulated intervening and moderating variables, the results are generally relatively abstract given that the data requirements lead to the general use of cross-sectional samples. Moreover, in spite of years of SEM modeling efforts in several marketing domains, the levels of determination achieved remain alarmingly low, at least for managers. Interest in ‘how to’ implement received findings is conspicuously weak, even though the main ethos in marketing textbooks reflects a managerial ‘how to’ orientation.

The research emphasis on antecedents–focal phenomenon–outcomes has resulted in stagnation at a theoretical ‘meta-level’ in a number of discourses oriented toward business marketing and sales management. These areas include key account management, customer relationship management, solution selling, and value-based selling, the discourse being stuck on identifying the headings of sets of activities that the ‘managerial implications sections’ claim need to be addressed in order to achieve measurable, implemented benefits. However, this ‘meta research’ remains largely silent about the necessary managerial activities their detailed contents, and the protocols for carrying them out in a world of complex interactions (Woodside, Ko, & Huan, 2012a; Woodside et al., 2012b).

One can, of course, carry out significant implementation-oriented research based on modeling or other reductionist approaches. Company-specific tools for modeling and operational analysis can be used when the target phenomenon can be realistically modeled and measured (see e.g., Rust et al., 2004). Another avenue would be to bring back managerially ‘actionable’ methods such as conjoint measurement and simulation modeling, strong tools for enhancing product and offering development, as well as sales management and other highly practical applications (see e.g., Choffray & Lilien, 1978, 1980, 1986). Similarly, experimental and quasi-experimental designs could be used for comparing the impacts of alternative business-marketing activities (Bonoma,

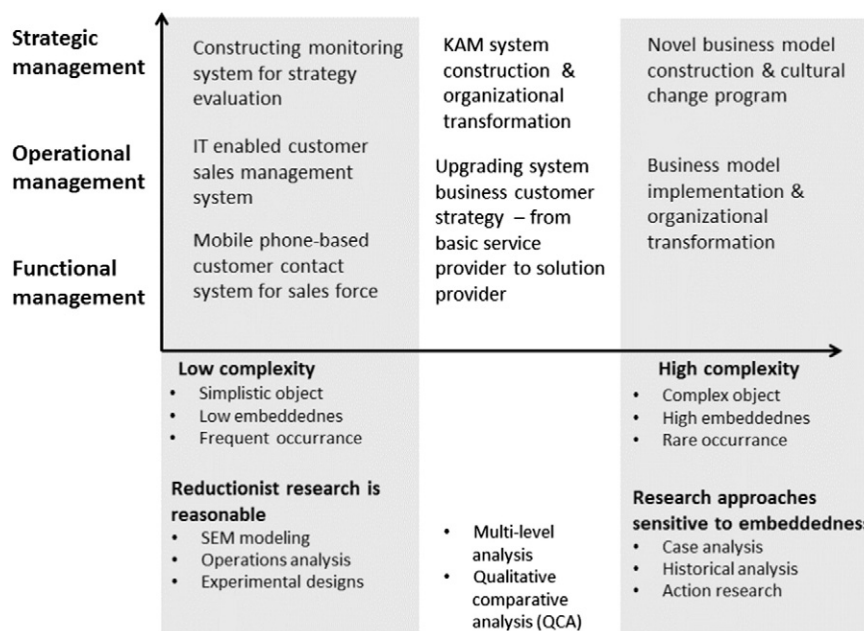


Fig. 1. Research Implementation Space (RIS).

1985; Zikmund et al., 2012). Even the SEM modeling we criticized above offers potential if the research is designed with managerial application as the primary objective.

Complementing the more established quantitative practices are a couple of more recent methods, especially multilevel analyses (MLA) and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), that allow relatively complex business-management issues to be addressed in managerially relevant ways. Multilevel analyses, for example, are well equipped to differentiate i) the organization-level capabilities of enabling actions, ii) management-level decisions that define actions, and iii) the individual-level activities that represent the actions as they are being implemented (see e.g., Homburg, Wieseke, & Kuehn, 2010). For more on the opportunities and problems associated with MLA, especially hierarchical linear modeling (HLM), in marketing, see Mithas, Ramasubbu, Krishnan, and Fornell (2007), and Wieseke, Lee, Broderick, Dawson, and Van Dick (2008). The QCA approach, based on fuzzy set logic (Ragin, 2008; Ragin & Amoroso, 2010), is also well suited to analyzing business-marketing issues that are organizationally embedded and contain complex configurations of interacting and nested factors, as in applications of KAM organization. For a general description of the application of QCA see Woodside (2010), and Woodside and Baxter (2013) for a discussion in the business-marketing context.

Although the above-mentioned methods address an essential part of the layered and multifaceted reality they do not have the capacity of case and historical research to reveal and describe the complex processes that are typical in most strategy-level management issues in business marketing: changing from a product-driven to a service-driven corporate business model and culture, constructing an innovation network with multiple partners, or establishing a marketing and sales joint-venture with a Chinese partner, for example.

As years of research on relationships and networks (see Ford & Håkansson, 2006 for the basics of the IMP Group approach, and Möller, 2013 for different streams in studies on business networks) indicate, assessing present-day business relationships and the supplier and customer strategies involved requires an understanding of the respective business and cultural contexts, and their historical evolution. Case studies can provide deep descriptions of how the business context and the company strategy influence various change processes concerning KAM implementation, customer strategies in solution/project business, or the installation of new sales-management systems, for example: see Helander and Möller (2007, 2008) on customer strategies in systems business, and Guenzi and Storbacka (2015 – this issue) on KAM applications.

In addition to enhancing analytical understanding, case studies allow the making of substantial context-specific managerial recommendations (see e.g., Partanen & Möller, 2012; Woodside & Wilson, 2000). For a more extensive discussion on utilizing the case-study approach in business marketing, see Dubois and Gadde (2002), Halinen and Törnroos (2005), Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, and Welch (2010), and Woodside and Baxter (2013).

To conclude, the following propositions summarize the complexity approach to managerial implementation:

- The higher the complexity of the issues/processes to be implemented, the stronger is the need for research approaches that are sensitive to the context and history of the focal organization(s). Case studies, historical analysis, and action research provide this kind of sensitivity to social embeddedness.
- The higher the complexity the better should the researcher and the manager understand the systemic nature of the focal issues/processes and their embeddedness, calling for real expertise. This requirement favors action research, in which the researcher becomes a partner in the co-creation of the implementation process.
- The simpler and more autonomous (versus systemic), and consequently the lower in complexity, the issues/processes/tools to be implemented are, the more reasonable is the use of reductionist

research methods.

- The lower the implementation complexity, the more readily available are various managerial guidelines, process protocols and toolkits.
- The lower the implementation complexity, the better the value that simulation and optimization methods offer.

In the following we summarize the contributions of the articles in this special issue to addressing these matters.

4. Articles in this Special Issue on ‘Implementing Strategies and Theories of B2B Marketing & Sales Management’

We called for reports on studies in the field of managerial implementation focusing on issues with strong managerial relevance in business marketing and sales management, or on implementation practice, or offering conceptual and theoretical suggestions. All eight accepted papers concern the practice of business marketing. Four of them adopt quantitative modeling approaches to assess the impact of various marketing and sales activities on outcomes such as new product launches, sales leads and salesperson performance, as well as relational and financial performance. The other four papers focus on case research in the contexts of service-led growth strategies, organizing for project and service business, organizing KAM practices, and assessing the organizational capabilities involved in value-based selling; one of these provides a theoretical discussion on service transition. Next, we position the papers in the implementation complexity space (see Fig. 2) and briefly describe and comment on each one. To simplify things we start with the quantitatively oriented papers and then move on to the case analyses. The former either address less complex issues or make more reductionist assumptions about the research themes than the latter.

The first paper in this Special Issue, written by Harri Terho, Andreas Eggert, Alexander Haas and Wolfgang Ulaga (2015), is entitled “*Implementing Sales Strategy in Business Markets: The Role of Salespersons’ Customer Orientation and Value-Based Selling*”. The authors shed light on the chain of effects that transforms a sales strategy as an organizational factor into selling performance captured on the level of the individual salesperson. Their findings demonstrate that a firm’s sales strategy is related to market performance and affects salespeople’s performance both directly and indirectly. Of the three strategic dimensions studied, only segmentation was found to have a direct impact on selling performance. Prioritization and selling models affect performance indirectly, via their impact on customer orientation and value-based selling. A strong point of the paper is that it simultaneously addresses the impact of organizational-level and sales-person-level aspects on performance. One remains curious as to whether the results obtained would be sensitive to the business strategy and the business context.

The second paper, “*Linking Key Account Management Practices to Performance Outcomes*” by Nektarios Tzempelikos and Spiros Gounaris (2015), enhances understanding of KAM implementation. Using extant studies the authors identify sets of key KAM practices on the strategic, organizational, tactical and control levels of management, and examine how they influence KAM performance. They pay special attention to the mediation effect of relational capabilities, and the relational outcomes they produce. The paper is geared particularly to helping companies identifying themselves as suppliers to increase their KAM effectiveness through relationship-oriented activities and skills. Again, it would be useful in the future to ascertain whether or not the results derived from a cross-sectional data set would hold for specific business types/contexts, say for business services, component manufacturing, and solution business.

Third, the multidisciplinary author team comprising Minna Matikainen, Harri Terho, Esa Matikainen, Petri Parvinen, and Anne Juppo (2015) examines the impact of a relationship orientation on the successful launching of new products in their paper entitled “*The Effective Implementation of a Relationship Orientation in New Product Launches*”.

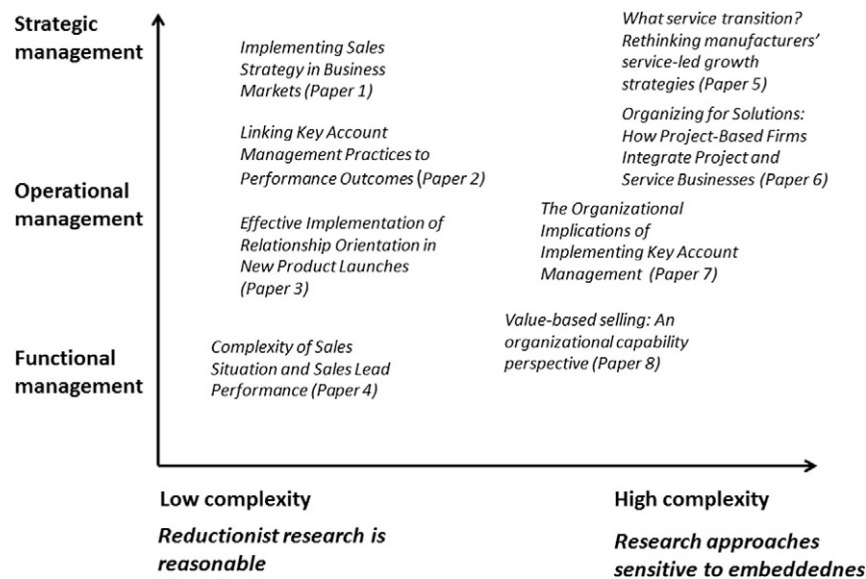


Fig. 2. Positioning of the Special Issue articles within the Research Implementation Space (RIS).

The study investigates product launches in 109 healthcare companies, drawing particular attention to relational activities in sales-force management and relationship leveraging, for example, to produce better business performance than product-centered or marketing-mix-oriented launch programs. In terms of implementability, the paper would have benefited from a more profound discussion on the specific aspects of the healthcare sector: how they affect the achieved results and their managerial application.

The fourth paper entitled *"The Complexity of the Sales Situation and Sales Lead Performance: An Empirical Study In a Business-To-Business Company"* was written by Tatu Virtanen, Petri Parvinen and Minna Rollins (2015). It examines the effect of relational complexity, internal sales-task complexity, and cross-business-unit collaboration complexity on sales-lead performance. Using data on 4000 sales leads in B2B solution selling, the authors show that close collaboration with customers is, in reality, related to a higher probability of canceled sales leads, primarily due to the fact that close collaboration is related to sales-task complexity. The implication that focusing on close collaboration is not necessarily the best way of increasing sales hit rates is highly relevant to solution-oriented companies and should be taken into account in the performance measurement of sales persons and teams. The presented research provides a good example of how close collaboration with a company can result in managerially relevant and rapidly implementable results.

Fifth, *"What Service Transition? Rethinking Established Assumptions about Manufacturers' Service-led Growth Strategies"* by Christian Kowalkowski, Charlotta Windahl, Daniel Kindström, and Heiko Gebauer (2015) questions the service transition that industrial companies are experiencing. The authors pinpoint the dangers of holding onto an increasingly large number of different roles and business models, instead of transferring to a service-provider role. Having analyzed what actually changes in a service transition, they come to the conclusion that firms should downsize and standardize their complex solutions. This would enable them to serve a greater number of customers and thus to realize the service transition in a less risky and costly manner. The paper illustrates how combining theoretical knowledge with an in-depth understanding of the empirical domain allows the development of managerially significant propositions.

The sixth paper, written by Karlos Artto, Aku Valtakoski and Heikki Käski (2015) and entitled *"Organizing for Solutions: How Project-Based Firms Integrate Project and Service Businesses"*, identifies, in a multi-case study, how eight micro-level integration mechanisms coped with

the complexity of implementing and integrating the activities of both project and service business units. The authors suggest that these mechanisms facilitate the management of a customer relationship over a system life cycle, thus enhancing customer loyalty and bridging the gap between solution installations. The paper is well anchored in the realities of complex systems business. The four different sub-cases and the longitudinal perspective allow the authors to create a set of concrete managerial recommendations.

In the seventh paper entitled *"The Organizational Implications of Implementing Key Account Management: A Case-based Examination"*, Paolo Guenzi and Kaj Storbacka (2015) develop a comprehensive understanding of organizational issues that firms need to consider when implementing a KAM program. They describe how a multinational company adopted such a program in a local branch, and interpret the change-management project the company followed. The result is a conceptual model for KAM implementation and a checklist to help academics and executives better understand how to investigate and manage adoption programs. The paper gives a good example of action-oriented research addressing a comprehensive and complex managerial change process.

Finally, Pekka Töytäri and Risto Rajala (2015) analyze the organizational capabilities that contribute to the implementation of value-based selling in B2B relationships in the eighth paper entitled *"Value-based Selling: an Organizational Capability Perspective"*. Having considered the existing literature and the practices of nine globally operating industrial companies, the authors conclude that the three phases of the VBS process – planning, implementation and leverage – involve 12 organizational capabilities. They also demonstrate that companies need to develop the salesperson skills of value-proposition design, value quantification, and value communication into organizational capabilities, which they argue are independent of individual sales persons. These value propositions could be enhanced in the future by examining the role of capabilities in different business contexts, and providing benchmarking for assessing the quality of each one.

5. Conclusions

We have discussed the implementation of academic research in business marketing management and introduced the articles in this Special Issue *"From Strategy Frameworks to Value-in-use."* Below we summarize the contributions by presenting a number of propositions promoting an implementation approach.

The implementation approach holds as a fundamental assumption that we are *striving for managerial relevance, impact, improvement, and actionability*. This orientation influences the entire nature of conducting business research. From the implementation perspective, research on B2B marketing and sales management should be motivated by and designed for *impact as a fundamental end-goal*. Although this principle is straightforward, following it is not so simple given the complexity and the barriers that complicate the carrying out of implementable research.

First, we have shown that implementation refers to many things, including: 1) the managerial implications of academic research, 2) theories or research-based propositions/programs/tools for intended use in business organizations/management, 3) research that studies the processes and effects of implementation, and 4) direct intervention or action research targeting specific implementations. These categories vary remarkably in terms of the directness of the aim for implementable results. Category-one research very rarely has any immediate managerial relevance. However, when based on collected and systematized research-driven knowledge and 'packaged' for executives, even single reports, generally books, can transform managerial thinking for years, sometimes even decades: Kotler's "Marketing management: analysis, planning and control" (1967) and Porter's "Competitive strategy: techniques for analyzing industries and competitors" (1980) are two examples. Note the term 'control' and 'techniques' in the titles. This kind of impact is obviously very rare.

In order to better understand the scope of managerial implementation and how research approaches differ in the kind of managerial knowledge they can produce we proposed a Research Implementation Space framework (RIS, see Fig. 1). The space is defined in terms of (i) the kind of assumptions researchers make about the relative complexity of the implementation object or domain (dimension 1), and (ii) the layers of managerial action (strategic, operational or functional).

We argue that there are severe limitations to the managerial usefulness of most business-marketing research based on SEM modeling because of the reductionist assumptions of this mainstream approach. Its underlying variable-based logic and general use of extensive cross-sectional data produce 'average results', which do not match the realities of strategic-level decision-making or organizational-change projects (Woodside et al., 2012a).

We do not suggest, however, that modeling has no managerial relevance. On the contrary, there seems to be a lack of studies reporting the use of simulation and optimization tools in customer and sales-management applications, and in other business-marketing domains in which reductionist assumptions are managerially reasonable. Such research should be based on real company data and objective performance measures, and should have managerially acceptable predictive power. In brief, we need 'tool kit'-oriented research and development with testable track records. It may be that this kind of activity is taking place, but is not reported for proprietary reasons, or because of the editorial criteria of major journals.

Most strategic-level business-management issues – such as business-model reformation and the construction of new KAM programs – represent highly complex problems within which actions are influenced by major contextual factors such as the business context and the current organizational strategy, structure and culture, to mention a few. This high embeddedness and the rare occurrence of these kinds of business reconfigurations make them relatively unique, calling for research and development efforts that are sensitive to complexity and embeddedness: in other words, case analysis and action research. Although there is an abundance of case analyses, especially of business networks and, to a lesser extent, business-model change, projects and systems business, detailed aspects of managerial implementation processes and performance results are rarely reported. Paradoxically, action research, which is best suited to addressing complex management challenges, is very rare.

What is the way forward? If research on business marketing is to retain its relevance and make an impact on managerial praxis we clearly

need to effect a 'research model' change. From strongly theory-driven and variable-based thinking we should be guided by an interest in collaborating to resolve complex issues in their real-life contexts. This calls for researchers who are able to bridge the theory-praxis gap and engage in meaningful dialogue with managers. This new breed of researchers should move away from the highly focused and narrow research domain/issue orientation so as to understand the complex, layered and interacting nature of business and social reality. These are tall orders, calling for nothing less than multidisciplinary and multi-methodological doctoral education, and radical change in our research and publishing cultures.

References

- Abratt, R., & Kelly, P. M. (2002). Customer-supplier partnerships: Perceptions of a successful key account management program. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 31(5), 467–476.
- Artto, K., Valtakoski, A., & Käarki, H. (2015). Organizing for solutions: How project-based firms integrate project and service businesses. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 45, 70–83 (this issue).
- Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1), 99–120.
- Bohling, T., Bowman, D., LaValle, S., Mittal, V., Narayandas, D., Ramani, G., et al. (2006). CRM implementation effectiveness issues and insights. *Journal of Service Research*, 9(2), 184–194.
- Bonoma, T. V. (1984). Making your marketing strategy work. *Harvard Business Review*, 62(2), 69–76.
- Bonoma, T. V. (1985). Case research in marketing: Opportunities, problems, and a process. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 22(2), 199–208.
- Bonoma, T. V., & Crittenden, V. L. (1988). Managing marketing implementation. *Sloan Management Review*, 29(2), 7–14.
- Boulding, W., Staelin, R., Ehret, M., & Johnston, W. J. (2005). A customer relationship management roadmap: What is known, potential pitfalls, and where to go. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(4), 155–166.
- Brennan, T. (2004). Should we worry about an "academic-practitioner divide" in marketing? *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 22(5), 492–500.
- Buzzell, R. D. (2004). The PIMS program of strategy research: A retrospective appraisal. *Journal of Business Research*, 57(5), 478–483.
- Buzzell, R. D., & Gale, B. T. (1987). *The PIMS principles. Linking strategy to performance* profit impact of market strategy*. New York: Free Press.
- Cespedes, F. V. (1991). *Organizing and implementing the marketing effort: Text and cases*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Chandler, J. D., & Vargo, S. L. (2011). Contextualization and value-in-context: How context frames exchange. *Marketing Theory*, 11(1), 35–49.
- Choffray, J. M., & Lilien, G. L. (1978). Assessing response to industrial marketing strategy. *Journal of Marketing*, 20–31.
- Choffray, J. M., & Lilien, G. L. (1980). Industrial market segmentation by the structure of the purchasing process. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 9(4), 331–342.
- Choffray, J. M., & Lilien, G. L. (1986). A decision-support system for evaluating sales prospects and launch strategies for new products. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 15(1), 75–85.
- Cova, B., & Salle, R. (2007). Introduction to the IMM special issue on 'Project marketing and the marketing of solutions' A comprehensive approach to project marketing and the marketing of solutions. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 36(2), 138–146.
- Damschroder, L. J., Aron, D. C., Keith, R. E., Kirsh, S. R., Alexander, J. A., & Lowery, J. C. (2009). Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: A consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. *Implementation Science*, 4(1), 50.
- Dictionaries (2010). *Oxford dictionaries*. Oxford University Press (<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/VAR>).
- Dubois, A., & Gadde, L. E. (2002). Systematic combining: An abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55, 553–560.
- Dyer, J. H., & Nobeoka, K. (2000). Creating and managing a high-performance knowledge-sharing network: The Toyota case. *Strategic Management Journal*, 21, 345–367.
- Floyd, S. W., & Wooldridge, B. (1992). Middle management involvement in strategy and its association with strategic type: A research note. *Strategic Management Journal*, 13(S1), 153–167.
- Ford, D., & Håkansson, H. (2006). IMP—Some things achieved: Much more to do. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(3/4), 248–258.
- Guenzi, P., & Storbacka, K. (2015). The organizational implications of implementing key account management: A case-based examination. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 45, 84–97 (this issue).
- Guesalaga, R., & Johnston, W. (2010). What's next in key account management research? Building the bridge between the academic literature and the practitioners' priorities. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(7), 1063–1068.
- Gummesson, E. (1998). Implementation requires a relationship marketing paradigm. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 26(3), 242–249.
- Gummesson, E. (2002). Relationship marketing and a new economy: It's time for de-programming. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 16(7), 585–589.
- Hälinen, A., & Törroos, J. A. (1998). The role of embeddedness in the evolution of business networks. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 14(3), 187–205.
- Hälinen, A., & Törroos, J. A. (2005). Using case methods in the study of contemporary business networks. *Journal of Business Research*, 58(9), 1285–1297.
- Helander, A., & Möller, K. (2007). System supplier's customer strategy. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 36(6), 719–730.
- Helander, A., & Möller, K. (2008). How to become solution provider: System supplier's strategic tools. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, 15(3), 247–289.
- Homburg, C., Wieseke, J., & Kuehl, C. (2010). Social influence on salespeople's adoption of sales technology: A multilevel analysis. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(2), 159–168.

- Homburg, C., Workman, J. P., Jr., & Jensen, O. (2002). A configurational perspective on key account management. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(2), 38–60.
- Hrebiniak, L. G., & Joyce, W. F. (1984). *Implementing strategy*. New York: Macmillan.
- Hyötyläinen, M. (2010). Towards "service factory": Managing the complexity of ICT services. Helsinki School of Economics.
- Hyötyläinen, M., & Möller, K. (2007). Service packaging: Key to successful provisioning of ICT business solutions. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 21(5), 304–312.
- Ivens, B. S., & Pardo, C. (2008). Key-account-management in business markets: An empirical test of common assumptions. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 23(5), 301–310.
- Jalkala, A., Cova, B., Salle, R., & Salminen, R. T. (2010). Changing project business orientations: Towards a new logic of project marketing. *European Management Journal*, 28(2), 124–138.
- Joyce, W., Nohria, N., & Roberson, B. (2003). *What really works: The 4 + 2 formula for sustained business success*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Kotler, P. (1967). *Marketing management analysis, planning, and control*. NJ: Prentice Hall Inc, Englewood Cliffs.
- Kotler, P. (1984). *Marketing management: Analysis, planning, and control*. NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Kowalkowski, C., Windahl, C., Kindström, D., & Gebauer, H. (2015). What service transition? Rethinking established assumptions about manufacturers' service-led growth strategies. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 45, 59–69 (this issue).
- Kujala, S., Artto, K., Aaltonen, P., & Turkulainen, V. (2010). Business models in project-based firms—Towards a typology of solution-specific business models. *International Journal of Project Management*, 28(2), 96–106.
- Kumar, V., Ramani, G., & Bohling, T. (2004). Customer lifetime value approaches and best practice applications. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 60–72.
- Laffan, B. (1983). Policy implementation in the European community: The European Social Fund as a case study. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 21(4), 389–408.
- Lamberg, J. A., & Parvinen, P. (2003). The river metaphor for strategic management. *European Management Journal*, 21(5), 549–557.
- LaPlaca, P. J. (2013). Research priorities for B2B marketing researchers. *Revista Española de Investigación en Marketing ESIC*, 17(2), 135–150.
- Lau, F. (1997). A review on the use of action research in information systems studies. *Information systems and qualitative research* (pp. 31–68). US: Springer.
- Lilien, & Kotler (1983). *Marketing decision making: A model-building approach*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Malthouse, E. C., & Blattberg, R. C. (2005). Can we predict customer lifetime value? *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 19(1), 2–16.
- Matikainen, M., Terho, H., Matikainen, E., Parvinen, P., & Juppoo, A. (2015). Effective implementation of relationship orientation in new product launches. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 45, 35–46 (this issue).
- Merriam-Webster Inc. (2004). *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*. Merriam-Webster.
- Mithas, S., Ramasubbu, N., Krishnan, M. S., & Fornell, C. (2007). Designing web sites for customer loyalty across business domains: A multilevel analysis. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 23(3), 97–127.
- Mol, M. J., & Birkinshaw, J. (2009). The sources of management innovation: When firms introduce new management practices. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(12), 1269–1280.
- Möller, K. (2013). Theory map of business marketing: Relationships and networks perspectives. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(3), 324–335.
- Möller, K., & Halinen, A. (2000). Relationship marketing theory: Its roots and direction. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 16(1–3), 29–54.
- Möller, K., Pels, J., & Saren, M. (2009). *The marketing theory or theories into marketing? Plurality of research traditions and paradigms*. The SAGE handbook of marketing theory, 151.
- Möller, K., & Wilson, D. T. (Eds.). (1995). *Business marketing: An interaction and network perspective*. Springer.
- Noble, C. H. (1999). The eclectic roots of strategy implementation research. *Journal of Business Research*, 45(2), 119–134.
- Noble, C. H., & Mokwa, M. P. (1999). Implementing marketing strategies: Developing and testing a managerial theory. *The Journal of Marketing*, 57–73.
- Partanen, J., & Möller, K. (2012). How to build a strategic network: A practitioner-oriented process model for the ICT sector. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 41(3), 481–494.
- Peffers, K., Tuunanen, T., Rothenberger, M. A., & Chatterjee, S. (2007). A design science research methodology for information systems research. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 24(3), 45–77.
- Pels, J., Möller, K., & Saren, M. (2009). Do we really understand business marketing? Getting beyond the RM and BM matrimony. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 24(5/6), 322–336.
- Peltokorpi, A., Alho, A., Kujala, J., Aitamurto, J., & Parvinen, P. (2008). Stakeholder approach for evaluating organizational change projects. *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, 21(5), 418–434.
- Piekkari, R., Plakoyiannaki, E., & Welch, C. (2010). 'Good' case research in industrial marketing: Insights from research practice. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(1), 109–117.
- Piercy, N. F. (2002). Research in marketing: Teasing with trivia or risking relevance? *European Journal of Marketing*, 36(3), 350–363.
- Porter, M. E. (1980). *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*. NY: Free Press.
- Princeton WordNet. www.wordnet.princeton.edu
- Ragin, C. C. (2008). *Redesigning social inquiry: Fuzzy sets and beyond*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 190–212.
- Ragin, C. C., & Amoroso, L. M. (2010). *Constructing social research: The unity and diversity of method*. SAGE Publications.
- Raynor, M. (2007). *The Strategy Paradox: Why committing to success leads to failure (and what to do about it)*. Doubleday & McClure Co.
- Reibstein, D. J., Day, G., & Wind, J. (2009). Guest editorial: Is marketing academia losing its way? *Journal of Marketing*, 73(4), 1–3.
- Rust, R. T., Lemon, K. N., & Zeithaml, V. A. (2004). Return on marketing: Using customer equity to focus marketing strategy. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 109–127.
- Rust, R. T., Zahorik, A. J., & Keiningham, T. L. (1995). Return on quality (ROQ): Making service quality financially accountable. *Journal of Marketing*, 58–70.
- Rust, R. T., Zeithaml, Valarie A., & Lemon, Katherine N. (2000). *Driving customer equity: How customer lifetime value is reshaping corporate strategy*. New York: The Free Press.
- Rust, R. T., Zeithaml, V. A., & Lemon, K. N. (2001). *Driving customer equity: How customer lifetime value is reshaping corporate strategy*. Simon and Schuster.
- Scarborough, H. (2002). The role of intermediary groups in shaping management fashion: The case of knowledge management. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 32(4), 87–103.
- Shapiro, B., & Moriarty, R. (1982). *National account management: Emerging insights*. Cambridge, MA: Marketing Science Institute.
- Slater, S. F., Hult, G. T. M., & Olson, E. M. (2010). Factors influencing the relative importance of marketing strategy creativity and marketing strategy implementation effectiveness. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(4), 551–559.
- Stevenson, T. H. (1980). Classifying a customer as a national account. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 9(2), 133–136.
- Stevenson, T. H., & Page, A. L. (1979). The adoption of national account marketing by industrial firms. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 8(1), 94–100.
- Terho, H., Eggert, A., Haas, A., & Ulaga, W. (2015). How sales strategy translates into performance: The role of salesperson customer orientation and value-based selling. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 45, 12–21 (this issue).
- Thorpe, E. R., & Morgan, R. E. (2007). In pursuit of the "ideal approach" to successful marketing strategy implementation. *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(5/6), 659–677.
- Töytäri, P., Alejandro, T. B., Parvinen, P., Ollila, I., & Rosendahl, N. (2011). Bridging the theory to application gap in value-based selling. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 26(7), 493–502.
- Töytäri, P., & Rajala, R. (2015). Value-based selling: An organizational capability perspective. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 45, 101–112 (this issue).
- Tzempelikos, N., & Gounaris, S. (2015). Linking key account management practices to performance outcomes. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 45, 22–34 (this issue).
- Varadarajan, P. R. (2003). Musings on relevance and rigor of scholarly research in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 31(4), 368–376.
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2010). From repeat patronage to value co-creation in service ecosystems: A transcending conceptualization of relationship. *Journal of Business Market Management*, 4(4), 169–179.
- Virtanen, T., Parvinen, P., & Rollins, M. (2015). Complexity of sales situation and sales lead performance: An empirical study in business-to-business company. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 45, 49–58 (this issue).
- Vorhies, D. W., & Morgan, N. A. (2003). A configuration theory assessment of marketing organization fit with business strategy and its relationship with marketing performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(1), 100–115.
- Webster, F. E., Jr. (1981). Top management's concerns about marketing: Issues for the 1980's. *Journal of Marketing*, 9–16.
- Wengler, S., Ehret, M., & Saab, S. (2006). Implementation of Key Account Management: Who, why, and how?: An exploratory study on the current implementation of Key Account Management programs. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 35(1), 103–112.
- Wieseke, J., Lee, N., Broderick, A. J., Dawson, J. F., & Van Dick, R. (2008). Multilevel analysis in marketing research: Differentiating analytical outcomes. *The Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 16(4), 321–340.
- Wikström, K., Artto, K., Kujala, J., & Söderlund, J. (2010). Business models in project business. *International Journal of Project Management*, 28(8), 832–841.
- Wikström, K., Hellström, M., Artto, K., Kujala, J., & Kujala, S. (2009). Services in project-based firms—Four types of business logic. *International Journal of Project Management*, 27(2), 113–122.
- Wilke, R., & Ritter, T. (2006). Levels of analysis in business-to-business marketing. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, 13(3), 39–64.
- Woodside, A. G. (2010). *Case study research: Theory, methods and practice: Theory, methods, practice*. Emerald Group Publishing.
- Woodside, A. G., & Baxter, R. (2013). Achieving accuracy, generalization-to-contexts, and complexity in theories of business-to-business decision processes. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(3), 382–393.
- Woodside, A. G., Ko, E., & Huan, T. C. T. (2012a). The new logic in building isomorphic theory of management decision realities. *Management Decision*, 50(5), 765–777.
- Woodside, A. G., Pattinson, H. M., & Montgomery, D. B. (2012b). Implemented strategies in business-to-business contexts. *Advances in Business Marketing and Purchasing*, 18, 323–355.
- Woodside, A. G., & Wilson, E. J. (2000). Constructing thick descriptions of marketers' and buyers' decision processes in business-to-business relationships. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 15(5), 354–369.
- Yadav, M. S. (2010). The decline of conceptual articles and implications for knowledge development. *Journal of Marketing*, 74, 1–19.
- Zikmund, W., Babin, B., Carr, J., & Griffin, M. (2012). *Business research methods*. Cengage Learning.

Kristian Möller is Active Emeritus Professor of Marketing at the Aalto University School of Business. Formerly the President of the European Marketing Academy, Dr. Möller is an active member of international research networks. His current research is focused on business and innovation networks, competence-based marketing and business performance, and on marketing theory. His articles have been published in *California Management Review*, the *European Journal of Marketing*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, the *Journal of Business Research*, the *Journal of Management Studies*, the *Journal of Marketing Management*, and *Marketing Theory*.

Petri Parvinen is Professor of Strategic Marketing and Management at The University of Helsinki, Finland, and Professor of Sales Management at the Department of Industrial Engineering and Management at Aalto University, Finland. Prof. Parvinen leads an interdisciplinary team of scientists concentrating on innovation selling, e-selling and business model transformation. He has produced over 50 different academic publications, scholarly articles having appeared in the *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, the *Journal of Management Studies*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, and the *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, for example.