Industrial Marketing Management announces the call for papers for the journal’s first special issue on theoretical developments in industrial marketing management. The deadline for submission is December 31, 2011.

Purpose of the special issue

Marketing as a discipline in general, and industrial business-to-business marketing in particular, has drawn upon a number of different theoretical perspectives from domains as diverse as organisational theory, systems analysis, economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology (Buvik, 2001; Murgolo-Poore, Pitt and Bertham, 2003). As marketing researchers we not only draw upon these diverse theoretical perspectives, but we also regularly combine differing theoretical lenses, from within and outside the management and marketing disciplines, to further our understanding. However, to build these new theoretical understandings and increase the relevance of marketing research, we need to be aware of the ontological assumptions and stances that such theoretical lenses use. Knowing how conceptually close or distant differing theoretical approaches are to the marketing phenomena of interest and how compatible they are in terms of their underlying properties and characteristics in providing explanations will have a major impact on the contribution researchers may make in using such theories (Okhuysen and Bonardi, 2010).

Given the importance of ontology in framing research contributions, it is surprising that greater attention is not paid to exploring different ontological and epistemological approaches in industrial marketing research (Easton, 1998). The purpose of this special issue is therefore to offer a platform for the exploration, comparison, application, and consideration of ontological choice and its implications in industrial marketing research.

In this proposal for a special issue of Industrial Marketing Management we would invite contributions that explore, compare and/or contrast differing general theoretical perspectives, and contributions which focus on the application of general theoretical perspectives to specific issues in industrial marketing research.

What do we mean by General Theory?

A widely accepted General Theory of marketing has yet to be formulated and adopted by the marketing research community. Nevertheless, there is a wealth of general theoretical models that marketing researches use, both implicitly and explicitly, to guide their research. General theories are intentionally both broad and integrative and removed from any specific social setting (e.g. a particular culture, industry sector, business type such as goods or services, or market context such as business or consumer markets). This means that they are broad enough to be used to explain a larger number of
phenomena, while at the same time their integrative nature means that their use serves to unify less general theories (Brodie, Saren and Pels, 2009). The explicit use of general theories provides an invaluable indication as to how and why theoretical unity may be attained in some situations. In addition, general theories may also explain key problems in attaining this unity.

An example of how General Theory might support industrial marketing research

One example of a general theory in the area of sociology is Structuration Theory. Structuration theory deals with the creation and maintenance of ideas and structures as well as with change and continuity processes (Staber and Sydow, 2002). Structuration theory defines a social system as any set of practices, patterns of interaction and social relationships which are relatively enduring (Parker, 2000). It is not new to the social behavior literature having been used in various contexts from interfirm networks, innovation processes, global virtual teams, organizational transformations, and dyadic relations to interactive marketing communication (Bryant and Jary, 2001). These uses have ranged from the reconstituting of entire research disciplines (such as accounting) or specialisms (such as the sociology of technology) to the reconstituting of an interdisciplinary field (Bryant and Jary, 2001).

How might the use of structuration theory inform industrial marketing research?

At face value, structuration theory might inform our understanding of the relationship between the micro-level actions of individuals and the macro-level processes and practices of social systems, in that the relationship between such systems and the exercise of individual agency is a primary concern in Structuration Theory. Accordingly, stronger theoretical linkages to structuration theory will help industrial marketing research understand better the relationship between the ability of network actors to act, and the coercive powers of network structure. This is significant to the practice of marketing management, as a well-informed articulation of managerial agency allows for a more meaningful calibration of strategic action, such as understanding the extent to which we can expect to manage or control focal nets and broader networks (e.g. Möller & Halinen, 1999; Ritter, Wilkinson and Westley, 2004).

How might industrial marketing research inform our understanding of Structuration Theory?

There is also the opportunity for industrial marketing researchers to contribute to our understanding of structuration theory. In his critique of British Social Theory, Anthony King points out that a new consensus is developing globally which “… no longer understands social reality in terms of structure and agency but in terms of networks.” (2010:258). King argues that we need to move from the closed systems favored by functionalist sociology to open and indeterminate social webs that transcend national borders. Here, the individual does not confront an already completed network, but is part of the collective and joint interactions that constitute network creation and maintenance. King states that moving from a dualistic to a network-centric ontology will be necessary in order to move the discipline of social science forward and to sustain the discipline globally. Here we see the opportunity for industrial marketing researchers to contribute substantially to this development.

How is theory commonly used in Industrial Marketing Research?
General theories differ from the common mid-range theories typically used to explain industrial marketing and network phenomena. Mid-range theories are closer to the social data and seek to provide a theoretical bridge between empirical findings and general theory (Merton, 1968). For example, the mid-range theory, dissonance theory, is neither a collection of empirical observations made of a certain culture at a certain time (i.e. empiricist) nor a sort of totalizing theory of behavior as proposed by Parsons (i.e. general), but is characterized as an intermediate theory that fulfilled a necessary next step in the progression of sociology to a total system theory (Rappert, 2007). In industrial marketing management we have the example of social exchange theory (which views social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties: Blau, 1964) as a commonly used mid-range theory. Because mid-range theories seek to provide a bridge between empirical findings and general theory this makes them more easily applicable to empirical investigation, whereas empiricism privileges direct experience (particularly sensory perception) in the formulation of our ideas.

Yet, due to the quest for explanatory simplicity, mid-range theories are often implicitly dependent upon more general theories. This can provide mid-range theories with the required ontological positioning and a more in-depth grounding. As a result, mid-range industrial marketing theories are often theoretically indebted to general theories in a way that is difficult to indicate by referencing alone. This also means that mid-range theoretical conceptualizations cannot afford to lose track of the overall progress made at the level of general theory, as omitting the general level of theorizing can also lead to mid-range theories losing their deeper coherence. Overly simplistic mid-range theories may hence fail to do justice to the complex ontological and epistemological nature of industrial marketing interactions and the process orientation of much industrial networks research.

**Why is this special issue of IMM needed?**

Problematically, mid-range and empiricist research in industrial marketing has made relatively limited progress in attaining theoretical unity in our understanding of buyer-seller relationships and industrial networks. For example, it is clear that blind empiricism cannot guide our knowledge towards a more unified theoretical understanding (e.g. Bierstedt, 1949, Freese, 1980a, 1980b). While empiricist research is driven by clearly articulated propositions, it is not clear how this research tradition “obtains such propositions in the first place? At what level of abstraction ought these propositions to be aimed? In addition, it is not clear how might insight into various middle-level constructs eventually meld into a unified theory?” (Raab and Goodyear, 1984: 257). This is in sharp contrast to general sociological theories, which by definition seek to provide both a well-theorized direction for empirical investigation and a means to attain higher-levels of theoretical unity (Freese, 1980a, 1980b).

As a response, in this call for papers we seek contributions that help to build stronger theoretical linkages between the industrial marketing literature and the common issues it identifies in industrial marketing practice, and general theory. Specific topics may include, but are not limited to the following:

- How might general level theories inform new or novel methodological approaches to industrial marketing issues?
- How might different general level theories inform our understanding of the relationship between the micro-level actions of individuals and the macro-level processes and practices of social systems?
- How might different general level theories inform an industrial marketing research question in different ways, and what are the implications for researchers in making such theoretical choices?
• How might common concepts in industrial marketing research, such as interaction, action, actor, agency, practice, relationships, episodes, and value be conceptualized and explored from different general theoretical perspectives?

• How might the choice and use of mid-range theories better reflect the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions of a general theoretical perspective?

• What are the managerial implications for differing ontological and epistemological choices in industrial marketing research?

References


**Paper submission and review process**

Papers submitted must not have been published, accepted for publication, or presently be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Submissions should be between 6,000 and no more than 7,000 words in length. Copies should be submitted via email MS Word attachment (in one file including all figures and tables, please do not submit a Word file with “track changes” active or a PDF file) to the *corresponding guest editor* (Linda.Peters@nottingham.ac.uk) as well as the IMM office (plaplaca@journalimm.com). Please indicate the paper is for the special issue on theoretical perspectives in industrial marketing management. The first page must contain the title of the paper and the names and contact details of all authors. For additional guidelines, see “Notes for Contributors” from a recent issue of *Industrial Marketing Management*, or visit: [http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/505720/authorinstructions](http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/505720/authorinstructions).

Papers not complying with the notes for contributors or poorly written will be desk rejected. Suitable articles will be subjected to a double-blind review; hence, authors must not identify themselves in the body of their paper.

**Guest Editors**

**Corresponding Editor (please direct all correspondence and submissions to the corresponding editor)**  
Linda D. Peters, Associate Professor in Marketing, Nottingham University Business School, University of Nottingham, Jubilee Campus, Wollaton Rd., Nottingham, NG8 1BB, UK  
Linda.Peters@nottingham.ac.uk

**Other Guest Editors:**  
Andrew D. Pressey, Senior Lecturer, Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster University

Markus Vanharanta, Senior Fellow of the Foundation for Management Education

Wesley J. Johnston, CBIM RoundTable Professor of Marketing, Center for Business and Industrial Marketing, J. Mack Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University