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Towards a Spectacularly Dynamic and Pluralist 'Normal Science': Pragmatism, Communication, IMP and BtoB Marketing Research

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4 **Towards a Spectacularly Dynamic and Pluralist ‘Normal Science’:**
5 **Pragmatism, Communication, IMP and B2B Marketing Research**
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10 **ABSTRACT**
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12 This paper contributes to the development and dissemination of alternative and critical
13 perspectives in marketing theory. It blends literature review and conceptual contemplation, and
14 challenges convention by “reading against the grain” (Brown and Wijland, 2018). In so doing,
15 our paper promotes the idea of coalescing American Pragmatism, selected communication
16 theories of rhetoric and industrial marketing and purchasing (IMP) group/ B2B marketing
17 research. We do this in an effort to challenge convention and advocate for pluralism and
18 diversity, theoretical evolution based on empirical evidence and an increased sensitivity to the
19 critical role of discourse, semiotics and abduction as a catalyst between theory, method and
20 empirical activities. This conceptual blending portrays ‘activities’ and beliefs as mutually
21 constituted through the symbolic mediation of rhetoric and discourse. The implication is that
22 activities must usually be justified by actors within communication as believable and this
23 process always involves mixtures of rational and non-rational appeals. Existing elements of
24 American Pragmatism and discourse are identified as already a tacit constituent of the IMP
25 oeuvre. Combining these approaches more explicitly is advocated as a suitable basis for a
26 potential future ‘IMP 3’ research agenda with significant potentials afforded to IMP and B2B
27 marketing research.
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34 **Key words:** Pragmatism, pluralism, figurative language, discourse, analogical reasoning,
35 communication, Business-to-Business Marketing thought
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Introduction

Our opening premise is that given the emergent and growing interest in practice, a pragmatic approach to Business-to-business (B2B)/network research within the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) community can serve to act as a frame for activities. Thus, pragmatism is being offered in this paper as a candidate for practice theory that fits within IMP sensibilities. Pragmatism at its most elemental is a philosophy that asserts ontological change. Change, in other words is reality. Reality therefore is always in flux and truths about it can only ever be ephemeral, imprecise, fragmented, uncertain and impermanent. The role of the pragmatist, therefore, is to find solutions that work best at the moment whilst always being prepared to adapt when these solutions prove not to be workable. Pragmatism involves combinations of abduction (guesswork about warranted assertions) and induction (involving workability) where it frames how these might be most effectively combined. Pragmatism's value, therefore, is in providing prescriptions for situated action in context based on socially constructed knowledge that has practical use. It is sympathetic to an agenda of networks 'becoming' (Lowe and Rod, 2018), which accepts a 'decentred' orientation. A pragmatic attitude to truth is only ever plural, often contradictory and permanently renegotiated and largely adopts the notion of verisimilitude (or 'truth-likeness') where competing propositions are more or less true in comparison to one another based upon the consequences that contribute to closeness to truth having to be relevant. The search for the opposite has not delivered what it promised. What works in pragmatist thinking is what is seen to work in constant negotiations between different motives. It can only be an evolving agreement and requires a commitment to change and to not getting locked into the prison of enduring certainty (if it's going to work as a guiding philosophy).

Thus, our objective in this paper is to promote the use of Pragmatism within IMP B2B/network research with its enhanced emphasis on developing adaptable, workable solutions to practical problems and where the focus on the usability of findings and the work produced means that implications and impact become a natural part of the research process rather than an afterthought at the end of a research project. Although the reader might feel that our approach oscillates between viewing pragmatism in its everyday sense (especially through the use of terminology such as "a pragmatic approach...."), our intent is to elevate the discussion to one where pragmatism is viewed as a guiding philosophy.

As academic researchers trying to both explain and guide what managers do and/or c/should do, we are all trying to address problems of complexity that are often too complex to really grasp. The world of B2B relationships and networks is a messy social world – where academic research is a “messy hodge-podge of competing, conflicting voices”, but where “The bringing together of competing and contrasting genres allows something of the messy social world to come through” (Highmore, 2007: 21). Thus, the simple argument which we advance is that the search for, and study of, general scientific laws and universal theories are an illusion; usually perpetrating a dominant worldview. The experienced world is far more complex and fragmented involving many voices (polyphony) and multiple discourses. This is where the use of figurative language (and metaphor more commonly), helps to try and reduce this complexity.

As will be illustrated, business relationship and network research that lauds an appreciation of both constructivist and realist perspectives corresponds to a tacit form of Pragmatism. It is further proposed that the IMP group, along with B2B research more generally, would benefit from a more explicit adoption of (principal aspects of) pragmatic philosophy. The relevant pragmatic concepts and theories involved, what these would mean for research and some implications for practitioners are outlined. In doing so it is implied that the distinction

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3 between 'normal' and 'spectacular' science is not consistent with pragmatic thought. It is
4 regarded as a dualism; which is a type of rhetorical ammunition involving 'weapons of mass
5 deduction' that has been used in polarizing battles and 'paradigm wars' within research in
6 marketing and management that, for many, were unproductive, impractical, divisive and
7 damaging (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005; Woźniak, 2011).
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9 Pragmatism and some communication theories both share an understanding that beliefs
10 configure activities through discursive framing of legitimate behavior. This suggests that actors
11 engage regularly in activities that they believe in and such belief is established in their
12 communicative interaction. The proposition is that this is a two-way and circular process.
13 Actors can also engage in activities, which they subsequently come to believe in after their
14 actions are justified in communicative exchanges. The view that emerges is that in brokering
15 between beliefs and activities, communication is seldom if ever confined to reason and rational
16 logic. Pragmatism can be regarded as sympathetic to an understanding of rhetoric as always
17 including both rational *logos* (or logic) and non-rational or less rational *pathos* (or emotion)
18 and *ethos* (or morality). As a result, when activities are justified in communicative interaction,
19 this is seldom limited to reason as it also includes ethical and affective appeals. In other words,
20 actors engage in regular activities that they believe in and their belief is never disconnected
21 from their emotions and ethics. All forms of persuasive communication are attributable to
22 varying combinations of the perceived logic of the argument, the attributed (moral or ethical)
23 credibility of the speaker and the affective consequences of the message on the audience.
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25 Andersen (2001) maintains that the relational communicative implications for the
26 relationship marketing approach have been limited despite the recognition of the importance
27 of communication in interaction and relationship development processes. A main implication
28 of the broadened understanding of rhetorical appeal is that multiple approaches need to be
29 employed in order to accommodate *both* logical rhetorics *and* analogical reasoning involving
30 non-logical, affective and ethical aspects of argumentation and persuasion. Pragmatism, it will
31 be argued, offers solutions to this because it is sensitive to understanding the importance of
32 adaptive understanding for both network actors and network research communities. Andersen
33 (2001) advocates the iterative grounded theory (Orton, 1997) as a methodological Pragmatism
34 that facilitates a 'back and forth' approach alternating between theoretical concepts and
35 empirical field observations. Another implication is that this pragmatic flexibility also
36 facilitates alternating accounting for less rational perceptions in addition to the prevailing focus
37 within the dominant paradigm upon cognition and reason.
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39 We would argue that the agenda of finding universal truths in nomothetic theorizing
40 appears to be a failed agenda that persists, not least because it's a part of the cultural capital of
41 **some managers and some business marketing/IMP** academics. This may continue but at the
42 expense of relevance to practitioners who inhabit complex, indeterminate lifeworlds; having or
43 using a lot of different forms or features and whose schemas and network pictures (Welch and
44 Wilkinson, 2002; Henneberg, Mouzas and Maudé, 2006) reflect this complexity and openness
45 to interpretation. **We do, however, acknowledge that there are practitioners whose managerial**
46 **lifeworlds are relatively simple because of their openness to and use of simple tools such as**
47 **dashboards, metrics and Excel spreadsheets containing all of the relevant information to**
48 **'manage effectively'**. Practitioners who benefit most from general theories recognize their
49 shortcomings but see their rhetorical potential for symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1984), or
50 persuading the powerless to be complicit and participate in their own subjugation. Again,
51 Andersen et al.'s (2019) mirror hall metaphor highlights the different temporalities and
52 perspectives for practitioners and researchers. This metaphor reflects Bourdieu's (ibid)
53 identification of problems emergent from the cultural gaps caused by a different *habitus*
54 between observers and observed. *Habitus* is not solely reasoned and rational as it incorporates
55 embodied know-how and a cultivated corporeal 'feel for the game'. *Habitus* is the 'modus
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operandi' or ethnomethodological nexus that enables structures of meaning as interpreted 'rules of the game' to be enacted in activities. Because researchers and practitioners occupy different life-worlds, their habitus must inevitably diverge. Invariably practitioners rely more upon a practical wisdom or 'phronesis' which is based upon experience, esoteric and ineffable 'know how'. Researchers by contrast usually are socialised into reliance upon a more objective logic that can be analysed and articulated with reasoned argument. By implication, researchers need to better adjust to a more empathetic understanding of the schemata of practitioners if they are to avoid the error of interpreting their behaviours using their own schemas.

In what follows, Pragmatism is outlined after a discussion about notions of paradigms that affect it. IMP research is then reviewed in the context of the pragmatic principles of abduction, inter-subjectivity and transferability before methodological implications are drawn. Before concluding, an outline for adaptive case methodology for IMP research is advocated as a beginning for a pragmatic way forward. It should be noted that our intent is not to reify pragmatism by repeatedly stating "pragmatism is or does.....". We acknowledge that it is human actors that 'are and do' but we simply wish to illustrate how 'being and doing' can be influenced by assuming a more pragmatic orientation. In this sense, when we state "pragmatism is or does", we are essentially arguing that "a pragmatic approach regards...or a pragmatic perspective asserts...". As will hopefully be illustrated, what works must be negotiated amongst all stakeholders and not what works for a few if pragmatism is to be effective. It also rather depends upon transparency and open dialogue. Pragmatism is capable of being hijacked by populism but that is true of most philosophical approaches.

Paradigms and pragmatism

Morgan (2007) identifies four distinctive notions of 'paradigm', including 'Worldview', 'Metaphysical / Ontological', 'Shared Beliefs in a Field' and 'Model Example' variants which range from broadly based top-down to a narrower, practical and bottom-up or contextual Pragmatism. This 'trade-off' between generalizability and context is a persistent issue and subsequently is transferred to a typological distinction of case methodologies (Welch et al., 2011). Morgan (2007) finds multiple versions of the notion of 'paradigm' in Kuhn's work but asserts that Kuhn's pragmatically oriented preference was for the 'shared beliefs' variant to be the central concept, which along with the others, Kuhn regarded as nested within each other holonically (simultaneously being a whole and a part). Kuhn's (1970) later work emphasizes this pragmatic 'shared beliefs' conception, which proposes that there can be intersubjective understanding and possible reconciliation of differences between differing paradigms (Tadajewski, 2008). The paradigms as 'shared beliefs within a field' notion of paradigms is pragmatically oriented in that it was not intended as metaphysically oriented but geared (explained here in pragmatic terms) towards adaptive, practical, shared consensus surrounding the bases for 'warranted assertions' about the workability of different 'lines of action'. Kuhn intended to emphasize paradigms as 'shared beliefs' to describe where researchers share a loose consensus about which problems are worth pursuing and how to resolve them. Kuhn's view was that it is necessary to strike a balance between shared beliefs and adaptability. He could see that fixed shared beliefs were a danger to evolving understanding but also could see that too loose a consensus results in fragmentation and cleavages in understanding, Kuhn considered 'spectacular science' emerged when a balanced, pragmatic consensus broke down and when disappointment with results created doubts about the workability of the existing consensus. One implication for case research, shared by Dubois and Gibbert (2010) as well as Piekkari et al. (2010), is the need to focus on the disciplinary context within which such shared beliefs are established. In order to connect Kuhn's 'shared beliefs and actions' emphasis with Pragmatism more directly, it is necessary to review the latter in some more depth.

Key aspects of Pragmatism

Pragmatism assumes (see Figure 1) that beliefs as ‘habits of action’ and activities are mutually determined and mediated by their initial perceived viability (or ‘warranted assertions’) and subsequently perceived ‘workability’.

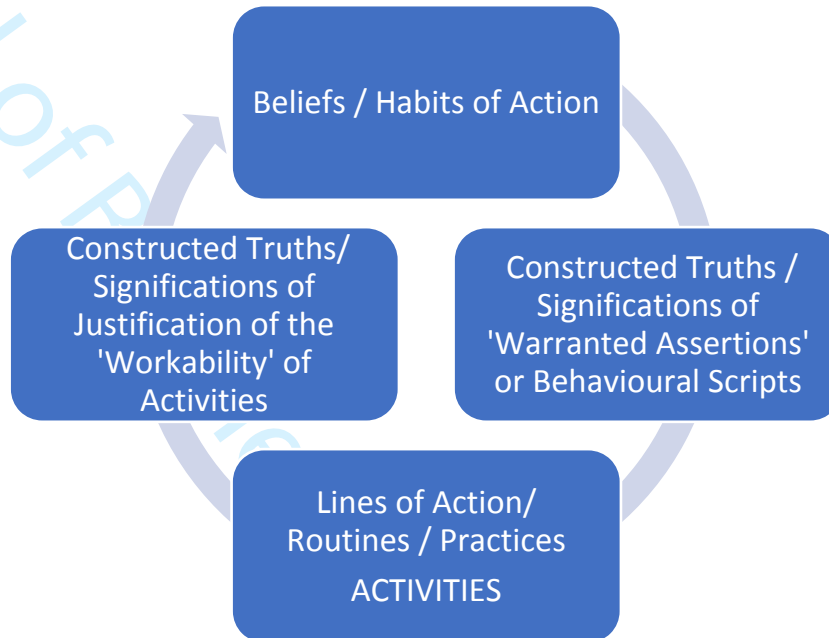


Figure 1. Pragmatism and the Circularity of Beliefs and Activities

Pragmatism regards actions, beliefs about actions and interpretations about the consequences of actions as mutually constructive and adjustable. Consequently, if something is not working, pragmatism suggests the need to be prepared to change beliefs, perceptions and/or activities in order to find practical solutions. If results are perceived as acceptable, actions and the beliefs presaging them will usually be maintained but if outcomes deteriorate, appropriate change through modification of action and / or the beliefs about action have to be made. Pragmatism engages in an iterative, ephemeral social truth-constructing process involving examining competing versions of (or beliefs about) problems and their practical solutions through effective activities (Fendt et al., 2008). Pragmatism does not encourage attachment to fixed understanding and is not supportive of rationalist or non-rationalist theories of human behavior. Pragmatism is more dedicated to what works; that is, as a tool “for prediction, problem solving and action” (James, 1909). In other words, Pragmatism understands that socially constructed truths are manifested in various beliefs configuring reality and its job is to develop an ephemeral form of truth that has most present relevance, credibility, applicability, value and benefit to the truth seekers. Pragmatism’s “essential emphasis is on actual behavior (“lines of action”), the beliefs that stand behind those behaviors (“warranted assertions”), and the consequences that are likely to follow from different behaviors (“workability”)” (Morgan, 2007: 67). Behavior, beliefs about the validity of behavior and judgements of the effectiveness of that behavior are mutually adjusting co-constructions within pragmatic thought and change is afforded by modification in one or all of these ‘pan-relational’ elements. Interaction through shared activities and sense-making about interaction along with judgments making sense of the validity and value of the interaction are the principle associations of interest for pragmatists. Pragmatism could be summarized as involving examining actors, activities, abductions and

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3 appraisals in inter-subjective sense-making interaction. Sense-making, from a pragmatic
4 viewpoint, involves making cognitive sense allied with communicative sense and sense as
5 embodied action.
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7 For pragmatists, there is no reliable and durable or permanent truth with direct access
8 to ontological realities; no absolute knowledge or ultimate answers or meanings outside of
9 those socially constructed within the frame of a group *doxa* (common beliefs, sense-making
10 'grammar' or commonsensical norms) through situated interaction, pluralism, community and
11 sustainable growth (Ruwhiu and Cone, 2010). In other words, Pragmatism recognizes meaning
12 as a continuous process of (re)negotiation using a shared discourse involving both co-operation
13 and coercion between actors holding both similarities and differences in interpretations about
14 the merits of behavior. Meaning is, consequently, always situated and ephemeral validation of
15 understanding accomplished in the moment and through communicative interaction in the
16 context of diverse experience, heterodox interpretations and power differences. All *epistemes*
17 (domains of true knowledge) involve degrees of conjecture and analogical reasoning and no
18 form of knowledge is completely and permanently reliable. For pragmatists, metaphysical
19 theorizing and ideologies seeking fixed, universal solutions cannot *alone* reliably determine
20 action because it can never adequately predict or adapt to the consequences of unexpected and
21 emergent change for beneficial outcomes of action consistently or quickly enough. Theories
22 then, are only ever useful up until they stop working. For pragmatists "an epistemology is valid
23 when ontology fits" (Fendt et al., 2008: 479) and the theory we are using appears to be
24 producing useful outcomes under current conditions. Theories are configured as meanings by
25 beliefs and transmitted through discourse. If a theory is not working, the beliefs, meanings,
26 episteme and rhetoric that sustains it needs changing to make a space for new theories than will
27 be workable again, until a time when they too stop working and further changes again become
28 necessary.
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32 Pragmatism emphasizes behavior, or action associated with an adaptive consensus of
33 beliefs warranting behavior and validation according to practical, positive outcomes which, as
34 will be shown, equates with the *doxa* (the domain of opinion, belief, or probable knowledge)
35 of the IMP group. Pragmatism can be explained in terms of cognitive dissonance; actors are
36 inclined to equate beliefs with actions in the context of outcomes. Beliefs and / or actions can
37 be both be mutually adjusted to accommodate each other and either or both may be modified
38 if they lead to negative experiences or outcomes. Similarly, Pragmatism is an approach based
39 upon shared beliefs and actions, framed within the axiology of ethical agreements, emotional
40 reactions and other beliefs. It is geared towards making a positive, situated difference in
41 outcomes. Shared beliefs do not come as universal agreement because contested understanding
42 within pluralism of opinions means that decisions are arrived at dialogically and involve
43 compromise as well as persuasion and imposition. Applied to research, Pragmatism does not
44 accept that underlying onto-epistemological assumptions should determine the design of
45 research questions and answers. Nor does it accept that paradigmatic differences are
46 incommensurable. Rather, Pragmatism aligns with semiotic and rhetorical theories that
47 recognize language as a creator of meaning and a vehicle of persuasion. To change anything
48 invariably requires a change to the discourse carrying meanings about it. In this respect,
49 Pragmatism adheres to the notion that 'the map precedes the territory'. Maps of reality
50 configure that reality and how it is crossed because every map emphasizes some 'intentional'
51 elements of a terrain and ignores others. Accordingly, to change a situation where one is lost,
52 Pragmatism requires drawing or acquiring a different map from the one that got you lost.
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56 Richard Rorty (1996, 1999) as a key contemporary theorist in American Pragmatism
57 identifies 'irony' and ironists as central to contemporary pragmatic progress. Ironists, contrary
58 to 'metaphysicists' are those who realize that because people 'see what they believe' and belief
59 is carried in maps of discourse that configure what emerges as truth within the belief system of
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3 a language community. People see what they believe and what they believe involves
4 combinations of rationality and non-rationality. To change anything, therefore requires a
5 change in the sense-making grammar of current language mapping, which can change beliefs,
6 and therefore perceptions of reality. This activity involving, communication, rhetoric and
7 discourse is not beholden to rationalism or reason because what works is never entirely logical.
8 Rorty (1999) charges the practical actor with becoming an 'ironists' who questions the
9 feasibility of any 'final vocabulary' or universal, permanent solutions. In other words,
10 nomothetic and universal, everlasting theories and a monological, rationalist discourse towards
11 their accomplishment are regarded as having failed by Rorty and most pragmatists. Realities,
12 'truths' and meanings are for pragmatists, therefore, made (and constantly re-made), rather than
13 found. Change is made through changed action and/or changed discourse. It is not dependent
14 upon prior theoretical analysis and exacting rational analytical orientations providing
15 categorical certainties about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. For the
16 pragmatist, practical realities are something of a 'language game' which requires skillful
17 creative and abductive narration and storytelling. For ironists, the final vocabulary is actually
18 only ever the current local, established and dominant, 'commonsensical', sense-making
19 grammar constituted by a received vocabulary currently in favor and a product of ephemeral
20 "poetic achievements" (Rorty, 1996: 100) reflecting current beliefs. Influenced, as were most
21 pragmatists, by C.S Peirce, Rorty identifies the signified, signifiers and referents as 'pan-
22 relational' and co-determined through indexical, iconic and symbolic signification. These
23 semiotic elements are co-constituted and dynamic. Changes in any of these semiotic elements
24 will result in change in meaning. Realities are, therefore, dynamic and semiotically made and
25 not found; projected and reflected, ephemeral and not fixed. The commonsensical reality in the
26 Age of Reason is mainly based on beliefs and carried in rationalist discourse mostly framed by
27 logos, Cartesian *Cogito*, quantification and nomothetic certainties of universal and eternal,
28 objective theories. This rationalist belief map can be modified, if and when it doesn't work,
29 with sufficient semiotic sensitivity and a poetic license for bricolaged (created from a diverse
30 range of available things) signification that Pragmatism gives the practitioner to change beliefs
31 and re-invent realities, where necessary, for the better.

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37 The rather shocking advice that comes out of Pragmatism is that the commonsensical,
38 sense-making grammar of the rationalist scientific 'semiosphere' is an ideological nexus of
39 beliefs and not an absolute Truth. Pragmatists see the rationalist scientific paradigm, because
40 it is dominated by the rational rhetorics of *logos*, marginalizes less rational ethos and pathos.
41 Practitioners, from this perspective, see the need for us to broaden our assumptions more,
42 interrogate our lexicon and trust our moral compass and embodied intuitions to a greater extent.
43 Pragmatism questions the objective of establishing any kind of 'final vocabulary' (Rorty, 1996,
44 1999) which imposes a unitary, legitimized rational understanding of reality. In pragmatic
45 theory, the focus is upon effective inter-subjectivity and shared 'lines of action', shared beliefs
46 or 'warranted assertions'. For research pragmatists, mixing methods, theories and even mixing
47 paradigms are warranted actions if 'workability' is established and sustained through such
48 blending. Spectacular change where a new paradigm obliterates the old paradigm is not a
49 pragmatically sensible as 'useful' aspects of the old paradigm always need preserving and
50 combining with usable, emerging ideas on an incrementally workable, adaptive and bricolaged
51 basis.
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Pragmatism: Theory and data, research process and inferences from results

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58 Based on published theoretical and managerial implications, IMP research, it can be reasonably
59 argued, has been partially pragmatic in character where implications have assumed common
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sensical and practical orientations and where top-down notions of onto-epistemological assumptions determining research activity or the idea that different paradigms, theories and methods are incommensurable have never been central to the doxa of the IMP group. Occasional onto-epistemological fundamentalism that contributed to paradigm wars within many academic disciplines has never been strong within the IMP research community, which has tended to avoid such dogmatism in the interests of practical and incremental progress. Pragmatist sentiment is evident as described by Järvensivu and Törnroos (2010) as ‘moderate constructionism’, involving “a community based yet empirically grounded crystallization of different perspectives” (Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010: 107). Pragmatism recognizes that the world is always pictured through evolving perceptions, communications and ideas validated in social interaction and seeks to equip groups with the capacity to change these validations if and when they begin to fail in terms of outcomes. Pragmatic research emphasizes an experiential and reflexive orientation central to understanding social activity and not constrained by the prevailing object-subject divide in the dominant scientific paradigm (Ruwhiu and Cone, 2010). Morgan (2007) asserts that Pragmatism offers a ‘third way’ to avoid the battles between the dualistic alternatives offered by subjectivist and objectivist paradigms. Instead of the ‘either/or’ choices that the warring paradigms offer in terms of choices between induction or deduction, subjectivity or objectivity and context or generality, Morgan (2007) suggests that Pragmatism offers the ‘both/and’ dualities of abduction, inter-subjectivity and transferability, all of which advocate ‘back and forth’ alternation between workable theory and applied methods in the ultimate interests of and arbitration through improved outcomes. This is the reason for focussing on these two aspects of Pragmatism – because they a) embrace a pluralist research approach and b) seem to resonate well with an already receptive IMP audience who’ve demonstrated early signs of a pragmatic orientation. After explaining these terms in a little more detail, each will be examined in relation to IMP research demonstrating that the latter has both been on a pragmatic trajectory and has great potential for adopting a more explicitly pragmatic approach in future research.

Abduction

Abduction has long been central to the epistemological preferences of Pragmatism and was central in the thinking of C.S. Peirce. Abduction is often described as support for practical epistemes of good and ‘intelligent guessing’ as feasible and often effective in practical action. Abduction involves communication of meanings, which are recognized by meaning-makers as mediated through networks of ‘intertextual’ references (Lowe et al., 2016). This means that abduction usually involves predominantly indirect and analogical interaction, employing carried meanings through allusions within a semantic web. In this indirectness and abduction of such communicative interaction, the ethos and pathos of the language community are played out in analogical expression. Influential prevailing ‘folk’ theories and mythologies about reality are carried within metaphors, narratives and other ‘tropes’ and such figurative speech frames pragmatic judgments about (inter)actions in the context of perceptions of outcomes. For pragmatists, change is more often facilitated indirectly through change in this ‘atmosphere’ (Lowe et al., 2016) by changes made, deliberately or not, in the tropes used to carry meanings within a speech community when outcomes of action are seen as disappointing or threatening.

Abductive reasoning in research is explained by Morgan (2007) as involving a practical ‘hermeneutic circling’ between inductive and deductive approaches through engagement in ‘mixed methods’ research (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) involving alternation between qualitative and quantitative methods. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue that Pragmatism is an ideal philosophical basis for mixed methods research because of its commitment to practical and effective blending of ideas and actions. They

advocate a ‘pragmatism of the middle’ that holds moderate or ‘ironic’ assumptions on issues of realism and pluralism. A version of this kind of Pragmatism, useful for mixed methods research, would revolve around the ideas of Peirce, James, Dewey and Mead. They (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) have comprehensively outlined this version of Pragmatism as a suitable theoretical basis for their advocacy of mixed method research.

Inter-subjectivity and transferability

In rejecting either / or dualism, Pragmatism denies that irrevocable choices between paradigms are necessary. In terms of assumptions underlying paradigms, this means recognizing that some of these create contention whereas others do not because they are shared. Joint actions, therefore, require pragmatic research strategies that can build upon what is shared and overcome what is contentious in a spirit of inter-subjectivity and co-operative affirmation (Morgan, 2007). Equally in administering a ‘both / and’ approach, pragmatists do not draw an absolute distinction between nomothetic and idiographic-emic or generalized and contextual knowledge. ‘Transferability’ recognizes that all knowledge generated will be more or less general or contextual and vary to the extent to which it is transferable to broader and more general contexts or to narrower transferability or not transferable beyond the specific context under observation (Morgan, 2007). For Morgan (2007: 72) “this involves a process of working back and forth, in this case between specific results and their more general implications”. Pragmatists are open to the potentials of the workability of understanding gained in one context, which means sensitivity toward how adaptations might be needed to make knowledge derived from one context usable in other contexts. Consequently “advocacy of transferability thus arises from a solidly pragmatic focus on what people can do with the knowledge they produce and not on abstract arguments about the possibility or impossibility of generalizability” (Morgan, 2007: 72).

IMP research: Abduction, inter-subjectivity and transferability

For Dubois and Gibbert (2010), abduction is an established although secondary episteme (to **induction**) in the IMP research tradition where theories and empirical observations evolve simultaneously and interactively. They cite Järvensivu and Törnroos (2010) who regard both critical realism and moderate constructionism as variants of abduction which practice pragmatic alternation between theory and empirical phenomena. Abduction as a ‘third way’ (Morgan, 2007) avoids potential excesses of naïve realism and naïve relativism (Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010) and an equally ‘middle ground’ position in relation to deduction and abduction. Dubois and Gibbert (2010) cite Woodside (2010) as providing evidence of a history of commonality of abductive Pragmatism in the form of alternation between deductive hypothesizing and empirical induction in theory development within industrial marketing management.

Lowe and Hwang (2012) associate the view of interaction within the IMP tradition as proposed by Håkansson et al. (2009: 27) to be “at the heart of business development” as being consonant with the Pragmatism of G. H. Mead (1913). The IMP central concept of interaction is akin to Mead’s interactional focus. Interaction in Mead’s terms is somewhat paradoxical as it, “involves what happens between people *and* to people over time and how they simultaneously retain some stability *and* experience change in identities and meanings. Interaction, from this perspective, is more complex than many other conceptions of it because it involves stability *and* change between *and* within actors.”. (Lowe and Hwang, 2012: 709). Interaction for Håkansson et al. (2009), Håkansson and Ford (2002) and Ford and Håkansson, (2006) appears a similarly complex, ‘both / and’ form of abductive Pragmatism. This is expressed as interaction involving various network paradoxes relating to actors’ scope of opportunities and the power to influence and control (Håkansson and Ford, 2002). Assessment

and solutions for network interaction within a set of paradoxes are eminently pragmatic and abductive as “Interaction in business networks leads to a process of learning and systematizing action. This takes advantage of the variety in the network and also capitalizes on the economy of network stability” (Håkansson and Ford, 2002: 139). Within the broader Nordic tradition having an influence on IMP thinking, the greatest proponent of ‘interactive research’ has been Evert Gummesson. Gummesson (2002, 2003) has been a long advocate of interactive research framed by the pragmatic understanding that for effective research journeys “theory generation and theory testing are not consecutive stages” Gummesson (2002: 346). Wagner et al. (2010) support Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) view of transferability as the naturalistic equivalence of generalizability and internal validity in positivism. They support the idea that complete and pure general transferability is not possible but confirm rigorous multi-methodological and cross-case analyses of networks (Halinen and Törnroos, 2005) as a way to accomplish the ‘tough challenge’ of narrower transferability.

Implications for methodology

In pragmatic thought, methodology is not presaged by theory, nor is it subordinate to theory, which is always a semiotic accomplishment configuring the acceptance of warranted assertions. From a Peircian semiotic viewpoint, a phenomenon or object (referent) is made real concurrently in the minds of the interpreters and through the signifiers used to create an interpretation of them through rhetorical strategies. This is represented in Figure 2. (below) with reference to the notion of **B2B relationships and networks**. ‘**Relationships and networks**’ is a semiotic accomplishment constructed by the referent (object), The interpretant (the signifier enabling sense-making in the mind of the interpreter) and the representamen (the communicative signifier). The creation is only possible through the semiotic processes that connect these elements. In terms of ‘**relationships and networks**’, for example, symbols connecting the interpretant and representamen would include anthropomorphic or ‘embodied’ metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) such as, for example, **networks** being described as having ‘sentiment’, ‘confidence’, ‘the *jitters*’ or ‘nervous reactions’. Pragmatists are not wedded to any final vocabulary that provides an immutable definition. By **relationships and networks**, we are referring to the older term of ‘**markets**’ of interacting buyers and sellers. It is explained as a semiotic image, not as in the traditional use of the term market.

A good example is the current struggle for establishing **relationships and networks** in new technologies. Elon Musk appears to understand the symbolic nature of this competition. Musk appears to recognize particularly the importance of iconicity. There are many names that could represent the new technologies (metonyms) and some, as parts, which could represent the whole (as ‘synecdoche’). Musk recently launched one of his Tesla cars into space as a symbol. The symbol is metaphorical in that it associates the domain of space travel with that of ground transportation. The symbolic rhetoric is an attempt to connect to connect the interpretant with the representamen and referent. In doing so, Elon Musk himself can be the iconic embodiment of new technologies. Tesla becomes a metonym and certainly could become the principal synecdoche for new technologies and the principal metaphor is of an (embodied) journey into a technological future driven by Musk in a Tesla. Journey metaphors are symbolically ‘good to think with’ in such strategic struggles because they “correspond to long-term activities, usually with a number of intermediate purposes” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 193). The preceding discussion also serves to address Stephen Brown’s recent lament that the use of analogical reasoning in marketing has relied too much on metaphor as one specific example of figurative language – to the exclusion or marginalization of other tropes such as metonymy and simile (Brown and Wijland, 2018).

The implication of the triad is that semiotics and meaning are dynamic and situated because when any element of the process changes, everything else modifies accordingly.

Today's signifiers can become tomorrow's signified. The speaker is never fully in control of speech or meaning. Culturally derived and evolving meanings impose a frame (of learned vocabularies, cultural expectations, schemata, patterns of behavior) which are used by cultural group members as resources in context. Both speech and speaker have some agency because the speaker is both speaking through discourse and discourse is speaking through the speaker. To be rhetorically effective, semiotically resourceful members cannot step outside culturally imposed boundaries of meaning except rarely when new meaning is generated, spreads and is taken up virally within the speech community.

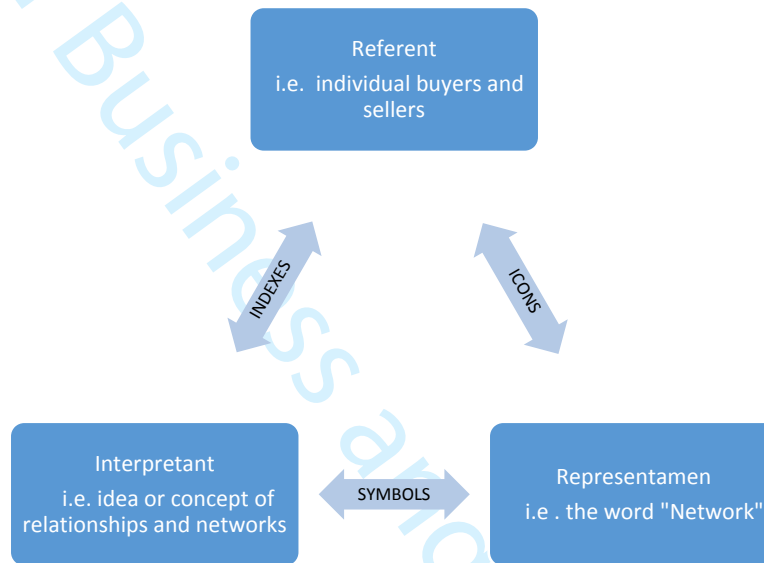


Figure 2. The Peircain Triad and the 'Network'

Academic theories and methodologies are also, of course, both types of signification. They are cognitive sense-making devices (interpretants) of a referent (or object) communicated by a signifier (or representamen). So, for example 'Service Dominant Logic' is a term (representamen) for an interpretant (theory making sense of network relationships) relating to a referent (actual practices of agents interacting in networks). Between these semiotic elements are semiotic processes that connect them in sense-making. These sign processes are iconic (involving contiguous pictures displaying purported likeness or resemblance to the referent), symbolic (cultural pictures; analogs such as metaphor) and indexes (material or embodied signs like sounds and sensory perceptions, including faces, voices, colors, pictures, music, noises, lights etc.). "Service Dominant Logic", for example, is a representamen for an interpretant of an object facilitated by combined tropes. SDL is a 'synecdoche' (a 'contiguous' trope where the parts constituted of multiple logics are subsumed into a whole and unified concept). The word 'logic' in the term is a 'metonymy' (a name change or adaptation of the consequences of or associations with a name from one domain to another). It is significant symbolically and rhetorically effective because within the academic speech community its etymology, *logos* has been a highly privileged notion since The Enlightenment. The legitimacy of 'logic' thus serves to rhetorically transfer credibility from the old dominant (product) logic to the proposed new dominant (service) logic. More subliminally 'service' has tacit semiotic influences. The etymology of service is its deriving from the Latin 'servus' meaning slavery. It has been normatively employed for centuries to name a religious gathering and a military commitment.

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3 Sub-consciously and inter-textually, therefore, service dominant logic appears more nominally
4 ideological than product dominant logic as it latently symbolizes prior commitments or
5 dedication to fundamental subjugation to an idea, ideology, myth or philosophy rather than to
6 an object (a product). Theories and methods are principally symbolic academic creations which
7 must, in order to work, first resonate *indirectly* through associated indexical, symbolic and/or
8 iconic signification processes. This means that as coherent and feasible academic
9 representations of reality, to become accepted within a scholarly speech community, must pass
10 tests of recognition derived from already established culturally evolved images. If there is any
11 doubt, one just needs to examine the multitude of metaphors and other tropes, including
12 'pictures' and 'sense-making', used within the IMP group itself over the last few decades as
13 analogs to imagistically understand inter-organizational relationships in business networks.
14 Similarly, metaphors and tropal 'images' have been ubiquitous forms of theoretical sense-
15 making within business strategy, (Cummings and Wilson, 2003), theories of competitive
16 advantage (Hunt and Menon, 1995) and in organizational theories from their earliest inception
17 (Morgan, 1986).

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21 Theories and methods, consequently, are seldom impartial, politically innocent, neutral
22 or objective and always have ideological underpinnings and political motives, carried in
23 discourse and other forms of action. Mixed methodology, which is a concomitant of
24 Pragmatism, also carries beliefs, ideologies and assumptions but the pragmatist is charged with
25 'epistemic consciousness'. This means pragmatists are expected to exercise a high degree of
26 reflexivity or 'mindfulness' about the beliefs that they hold and the discourses and
27 'atmospheres' they inhabit so that these semiotic vehicles can be more readily changed
28 in the interest of improved outcomes where necessary.
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30 31 **Mixed methods and case mixing in IMP research**

32 Pragmatism has been a philosophical inspiration for mixed methodology advocates (Johnson
33 and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It offers a diversity of ideas suitable for the purposes of blending and
34 mixing methods, integrating epistemologies and crossing paradigms (Johnson and
35 Onwuegbuzie, 2004) highlighting the more complex ontological perspective of Andersen et
36 al's (2019) hall of mirrors metaphor, which relies on "different ways on the social reality of
37 concepts and conceptual connections given by the transparency illusions, and over time our
38 constructivist understanding and realist theorizing are changing" (pg. 9). Assuming a pragmatic
39 case methodological approach that employs a temporal hall of mirrors metaphor, "When the
40 connections between concepts hold the temporal in view the research is more constructivist,
41 but when the connections stabilize the concepts the research is more realist in nature" (ibid).
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43 In terms of case methods, the principal and preferred approach practiced within the IMP
44 group, employing a pragmatic orientation would mean adopting mixed case methods. Dubois
45 and Gibbert (2010) identify existing interplay between theory, method and empirical data in
46 industrial marketing case research and mixing the 'gamut' of deductive and abductive
47 approaches. They see the Industrial Network Approach as a tradition of mutually adjusting
48 theoretical, empirical and methodological development (Dubois and Gibbert, 2010: 131) and
49 describe their own focus as equally "pragmatic" (Dubois and Gibbert, 2010: 130). They
50 advocate pragmatic development of this interplay through a transparent plurality as a way
51 forward that renders the complexities involved more coherent and avoids over-complications
52 that render inter-subjective communication and understanding between research stakeholders
53 difficult. Methodological pluralism for Evers et al. (2017) is evident within IMP case research
54 although much of it is implicit and/or unexploited Evers et al. (2017). For these researchers this
55 lack, at least in part, accounts for the paucity of accounting for the critical importance of
56 discursive, cognitive and other temporal processes in B2B relationship development. IMP case
57 research has been described in terms of consisting of a dual methodological identity, which
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3 Andersen and Kragh (2010) have termed *in-vivo* as differentiated from *ex ante*. In seeking to
4 equate the 'sense' afforded in case data focus with the 'sensibility' provided by theory
5 emphasis, they regard the difference between conventional, within (usually the functionalist)
6 paradigm methodology (*in-vivo*) and alternative, more 'de-centered' interpretivism as
7 requiring an either/or choice. However, this dualism is a rather naïve 'black and white'
8 depiction of opposing antimonies. Welch et al. (2011) in the context of international business
9 research, identify four case methodologies depicted within a schema determined by the degree
10 of theory or causal explanation and the degree of contextualization achieved by the methods
11 identified. The differences between these case methods is less starkly dualistic and Welch et
12 al. (2011) argue for pluralism in the same spirit as Pragmatism. Welch et al. (2011) maintain,
13 in accordance with Easton (2010), that the case method they call 'contextualized explanation'
14 using a critical realist agenda provides the best potential for accommodating both theory
15 building and contextualization and where constructivist, realist and critical realist perspectives
16 can co-exist as long as there remain meanings and possibilities to enhance our understanding
17 (Andersen et al., 2019).

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21 The value of these typologies is in their identification of the pluralistic array of case
22 methods in play in case research. A pragmatist approach that employed blended, mixed or
23 multiple methods would not favor any single choice within this array (Creswell et al., 2003)
24 but would promote mixing of these case methods in differing combinations within different
25 contexts, using combinations of theories in the light of ongoing results and their interpretations.
26 Andersen and Kragh (2010) similarly advocate exploring the paradoxes generated by using
27 multiple paradigms and theories within the 'ex-ante' approach. For pragmatists, this is rather
28 too metaphysical. Instead pragmatic case mixing methodology emphasizes the epistemological
29 prioritization of mixing methods over the ontological mixing of theories.

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31 The pragmatic focus of Dubois and Gibbert (2010) is expressed in their conclusions.
32 Links created as a result of the interplay between theoretical, empirical and methodological
33 choices are their pragmatic priority. Deductive and inductive case approaches each emphasize
34 different beginnings and target different sequential priorities but mixing or blending of these
35 approaches abductively promises synergistic capitalization of the advantages of each of them.
36 The case study research pragmatist, therefore, alternates abductively through 'systematic
37 combining' (Dubois and Gadde, 2002) through mutual adjustment between research behavior
38 (empirical action), ideas about behavior (theories) and results (findings and their
39 interpretations). Pragmatic case research applies an adaptive, practical, shared consensus
40 surrounding the bases for 'warranted assertions' about the workability of different 'lines of
41 action'. The main point for Dubois and Gibbert (2002) is to emphasize strong theory-data links
42 through a "pragmatic common denominator" (Dubois and Gibbert, 2002: 130) of necessary
43 'transparency' required to make cases adequately understandable for readers to follow by
44 reducing complexity to bring it within comprehensibility. This means recognition is expected
45 of a pragmatic consciousness that actions, beliefs about actions and interpretations about
46 actions are 'ontic' co-creations representing and inventing reality as pictures or maps; they are
47 never 'ontological'.

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51 There is a semiotic and rhetorical requirement consistent with pragmatist philosophy
52 which recognizes that pluralism brought with abduction poses the challenges of accountability
53 and transparency because any 'back and forth' between maps of de-centered induction and
54 pictures of centered deduction invariably involve 'polyphony' or switching from one discourse
55 to another. Such switching or blending is difficult not least because the criteria for judging the
56 value of any research are particular reflections of the beliefs and assumptions held both
57 explicitly and tacitly within paradigms. For assertions to be 'warranted' (not dissonant with
58 shared beliefs and cognitions presaging behavior), they first have to be comprehensible to those
59 to whom they are made. By implication, the effective abductive, pragmatic case researcher is

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3 going to have to command advanced rhetorical skills and semiotic capabilities if these
4 communicative difficulties are to be overcome. Recall Brownlie's (1997) assertion that despite
5 marketing's longing to join the ranks of hard science, it remains a profoundly literary
6 discipline. These issues include a call for necessary reflexivity about the most appropriate
7 semiotic modes to employ in reporting to audiences, which might mean innovation from
8 established representational traditions of vocabularies or media used (Borghini et al., 2010) in
9 reporting case studies. This key communicative competence has been severely retarded by a
10 general lack of knowledge of mixed methods literature or adequate mixed methods design plans
11 in recent marketing papers claiming to be conducting such research (Harrison and Reilly,
12 2011). As a result, such research has too often failed to adequately integrate inductive and
13 deductive data, has been predominantly sequential with privilege mostly afforded to
14 quantitative data and has too often failed to capitalize upon the potential benefits of mixed
15 methods research because of poor implementation (Harrison and Reilly, 2011).
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19 *A brief outline for a mixed case methodology for IMP research*

20 Mixed methods research has been described as a third research 'paradigm' to complement
21 quantitative objectivism and qualitative subjectivism (Johnson, et al. 2007). In 'pure' mixed
22 methodology, equality is afforded to both objective and subjective criteria for research design,
23 operation and analysis. It entails comprehensive 'triangulation' involving, where necessary,
24 'between-method' combinations of triangulation in data, investigators, theories and methods
25 (Denzin, 1978). Mixed methods can be accomplished within case methodology as long as
26 qualitative and quantitative techniques, criteria for selection and interpretation are afforded
27 equal importance. Case study methods available for such mixing include a range from
28 'inductive' to 'postmodern' as outlined in Table 1. (below).
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31 Mixing of these methods requires equal treatment in terms of two sets (qualitative and
32 quantitative) of onto-epistemological assumptions and empirical execution. In pragmatic terms
33 this is best achieved simultaneously, even if this poses the greatest semiotic challenge because
34 simultaneous mixing requires something of a 'double-thinking' and 'double-speaking' ability
35 where both qualitative and quantitative discourses are both used together and treated equally.
36 The alternative, which is to use methods sequentially, can easily result in one of the methods
37 being afforded privilege over the other. Although not inevitable, this is likely given that the
38 researcher(s) can be expected to be more firmly or numerically located in one paradigm over
39 another. It is feasible that if due care is taken to assemble a research team and careful
40 construction of a mixed case method design plan that both simultaneous and sequential
41 approaches could be pragmatically made to work. Harrison and Reilly (2011) report, in
42 reviewing mixed methodology in marketing research in general, that sequential rather than
43 simultaneous or concurrent mixing was more evident. Further exploration reveals that much of
44 this is due to reviewers requesting triangulations after a first review. Given that neither form
45 of mixed methodology appears, so far at least, has been particularly well planned or executed,
46 it seems obvious that researchers would enhance their prospects for publication by better
47 planning and execution of mixed methodology. In terms of sequential mixed methodologies,
48 Ivankova et al. (2006) set out detailed and useful advice on issues of procedure, analysis and
49 presentation. Within mixed case methodology, as 'contextualized explanation' is something of
50 an axis case methodology between more quantitative-objectivist and qualitative-subjectivist
51 case methods, this 'critical realist' approach could figure as a useful catalyst or bridge between
52 objectivist (centered) and subjectivist (de-centered) approaches in mixed case methodology
53 research.
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OBJECTIVE/ Centered -----			SUBJECTIVE/ Decentered	
Inductive Theory-Building	Natural Experiment	Contextualized Explanation	Interpretive Sensemaking	Postmodern Ex-ante Cases
Eisenhardt (1989)	Yin (2009)	Bhaskar (1988)	Stake (1995)	Andersen and Kragh (2010)
Positivist/ empiricist.	Positivist/ falsificationist	Critical Realist	Non-positivist / Interpretivist	Postmodern 'Ex-ante' cases
Substance metaphysics / Realist ontology	Substance metaphysics / Realist ontology	Realist ontology/ Non-positivist epistemology	Nominalist ontology	Nominalist ontology Anti-positivist epistemology
Subject-centered	Subject-centered	Subject-centered	De-centering subject	De-centered subject
Purpose to construct testable hypotheses for hypo- deductive theory testing	Purpose to deductively test hypotheses or propositions	Purpose to produce 'cause-of-effects' explanations integrated into context	Purpose to understand the idiographic-emic aspects of actors' experiences and their constructions of meanings through 'thick description' of context	Purpose to seek theoretical paradoxes through tensions or oppositions by employing 'ironic metaphysics' using theories as metaphors and language games in order to develop stories of theory

Table 1. A Multitude of Case Approaches

Concluding discussion

From its inception, the IMP group has displayed a 'muddling through' Pragmatism along with a tolerance of diverse perspectives (Cova et al., 2015). During the consolidation of theory during 'IMP 2' during the 1990's conceptual developments mirrored the evolving conceptual landscape of B2B marketing (Cova et al., 2015). More recently, IMP research seems to have returned to more innovation whilst holding onto a Pragmatism of incremental theoretical changes through "perpetual rejuvenation movement" (Cova et al., 2015: 83), mutually evolving with empirical case research. It may be that the IMP is ready for the next theoretical advancement, which might be properly termed 'IMP 3'. The subtext of this paper has been an exploration of Pragmatism as philosophical inspiration for such a potential venture. A coalescence between American Pragmatism, Rhetorical Theories and IMP/ B2B marketing research has been examined. Existing elements of Pragmatism and rhetoric have been identified as an already tacit constituent of the IMP oeuvre. The blending of Pragmatism and Rhetoric / Semiotics within the IMP research community as a more explicit philosophy is an implied suitable basis for the development of an IMP 3 phase of theory development. Such an approach would serve to codify the tacit Pragmatism within the IMP, emphasizing pluralism and diversity, theoretical evolution based on empirical evidence and an increased sensitivity to the critical role of discourse, semiotics and abduction as a catalyst between theory, method and empirical activities. We echo Brown and Wijland's (2018) conclusion that for marketing

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3 scholars to master their art / craft, they need to be aware not only of the range of tools that are
4 available but when they're appropriate for figurative purpose. Such formal codification of an
5 already tacit pragmatic IMP *doxa*, it can be feasibly suggested, offers a possible
6 epistemological 'glue' that can be re-applied to keep an already established, tolerant and
7 cohesive research community together to continue to make valued contributions, through
8 shared beliefs in inter-subjective, dynamic pluralism, to the field of B2B marketing research
9 for another generation.
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