How to Develop Great Conceptual Frameworks for Business-to-Business Marketing

Adam Lindgreen, Copenhagen Business School and University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science[1,2]

C. Anthony Di Benedetto, Fox School of Business, Temple University[3]

Roderick J. Brodie, University of Auckland Business School[4]

Elina Jaakkola, Turku School of Economics, University of Turku[5]

[1] Adam Lindgreen, Department of Marketing, Copenhagen Business School, Solbjerg Plads 3, 2000 Frederiksberg C, Denmark and University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science, 26 Melville Road, Illovo, Johannesburg, South Africa. E-mail: adli.marktg@cbs.dk.

[2] All authors contributed equally.

[3] C. Anthony Di Benedetto, Fox School of Business, Alter Hall 523, 1801 Liacouras Walk, Philadelphia, PA 19122-6083, USA. E-mail: tonyd@temple.edu.

[4] Roderick J. Brodie, Department of Marketing, University of Auckland Business School, Owen G. Glenn Building, 12 Grafton Road, Auckland 1010, New Zealand. E-mail: r.brodie@auckland.ac.nz.

[5] Elina Jaakkola, Turku School of Economics, University of Turku, Rehtorinpellonkatu 3, 20500 Turku, Finland. E-mail: Elina.jaakkola@utu.fi.

ABSTRACT

Robust conceptual frameworks are essential to building academic knowledge. Theory development involves high-quality conceptualization that integrates and builds on existing knowledge, possibly using a multi-disciplinary approach. Further, especially in an applied research area such as business-to-business marketing, the emerging theory will have meaningful implications for managerial decision-makers. Insightful conceptual framework development advances theory substantially, not incrementally. Theoretical development can be either purely conceptual or based on empirical data. Nevertheless, there are comparatively few guidelines for the process of conceptual framework development. This editorial discusses pathways to developing conceptual frameworks to support academic research, with emphasis on business-to-business marketing research. As guidelines and conventions are available for data-driven approaches such as grounded theory, we focus on theorizing processes in which existing theory plays a pivotal role.

Keywords: Conceptual articles; theory development; conceptual framework; theorizing.

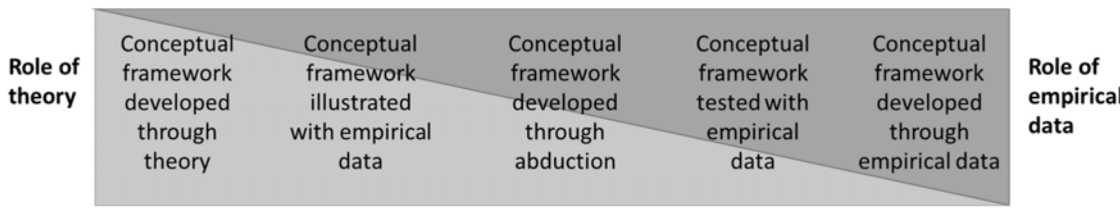
1. INTRODUCTION

Robust conceptual frameworks play a critical role in advancing academic and practical knowledge. Development of theory requires high-quality, novel conceptualizations and advancements that integrate existing theories, link research across disciplines, provide multi-level insights to move the field forward with substantial leaps rather than incremental steps. For academic researchers in business-to-business marketing, it is essential for emerging theory to be a source of practical insight to support decision-makers. Despite the importance and contribution of insightful conceptual frameworks, existing methods, books, and articles have seldom elaborated on how to develop these frameworks.. The issue of developing conceptual frameworks is relevant for different research approaches, both purely conceptual and those based on empirical data. As far as business-to-business marketing research is concerned, *Industrial Marketing Management*, as the leading business-to-business marketing journal, needs to take a leadership position by prioritizing the development of conceptual work, which meaningfully advances theory.

Conceptual frameworks can offer a substantive contribution to warrant publication on their own, without empirical data; or such frameworks can be motivated, illustrated, and fleshed out with empirical data. Articles of this type are typically labelled as conceptual or theoretical articles, as they use existing literature as their primary source for developing novel frameworks

(Jaakkola, 2020) (see Figure 1). Conceptual frameworks also can be developed through an abductive process where researchers move between theory and empirical data to develop a framework. The theorizing process is guided, but not determined, by existing theory, as is typical for many qualitative studies (e.g., Dubois & Gadde, 2002, Nenonen et al., 2017). In contrast, the role of empirical data is substantial when the focus is on testing conceptual frameworks. This is also the case when the framework is developed solely on the basis of empirical data (as in the development of grounded theory).

Figure 1: Role of Theory vs. Empirical Data in Developing Conceptual Frameworks



The purpose of this editorial is to consider explicitly various pathways to developing conceptual frameworks and how these pathways can be used to create new conceptual frameworks to support research, with a particular focus on business-to-business marketing. This editorial focuses on theorizing processes where existing theory plays a pivotal role (as shown in Figure 1). Following Brodie and Peters (2020), we see conceptual frameworks emerging from interfaces between i) general theoretic perspectives and midrange theories; ii) multiple midrange theories, and iii) applied theories and midrange theories. Less attention is given to the more data-driven approaches such as grounded theory (e.g., Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) because there are robust guidelines and established conventions to guide the theorizing.

To shed light on some of the challenges involved in developing, and writing about, conceptual frameworks, we frame our discussion around three specific styles of conceptual writing introduced by Cornelissen (2017) in his review of conceptual articles published in the *Academy of Management Review*. His examination identified three conceptual styles: i) articles that are centred on a set of propositions (propositional style),ii) articles that develop a process model (narrative style), and iii) articles that build or elaborate on a theoretical typology (typological style). We outline practical research design considerations (see Jaakkola, 2020) for each style and present an illustrative example of each style.

Insightful conceptual frameworks are essential to integrating existing knowledge and setting the agendas for future business-to-business marketing research. A significant weakness of many conceptual frameworks is that the theory used is too narrow in scope; and that the resulting conceptual development lacks strong theoretical foundations and fails to bridge theory and practice. We contribute value by providing researchers with templates and guidance in developing conceptual frameworks is a more explicit and systematic manner. Influential.

2. HOW THEORY INFORMS THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Weick (1995), in his essay "What Theory is Not, Theorizing Is," laments that in organizational studies, there are few attempts to develop and use what he refers to as strong theory. In particular, he criticizes researchers of "lazy theorizing in which researchers try to graft theory onto stark sets of data" (p. 385). This occurs because there is confusion between theory as the outcome and theorizing as a process. Theory often is presented in the form of references, data, lists of diagrams, and hypotheses, which, while they are essential parts of the theorizing process, are not theory *per se*. Thus, when considering how theory informs the development of conceptual manuscripts, it is important place emphasis on the theorizing processes.

While the question "what is theory?" has been debated extensively, for the purpose of this editorial we use a simple general definition that "theory is a statement of concepts and their interrelationships that shows how and/or why a phenomenon occurs" (Corley & Gioia, 2011: p. 12). In a previous editorial, we drew on Brodie and Peters (2020) to distinguish between three levels of theoretical abstraction (Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and van der Borgh, 2020b).

General theories: These theories are conceptions and perspectives utilizing theory that is framed at the highest conceptual level and provides a perspective or logic of explanation for a domain. The theories are broad in scope, integrative, and context-free, and thus the theories do not directly lead to empirical investigation. The theories provide the foundations for understanding and explanation and are informed by a paradigmatic perspective.

Midrange theories: Midrange theories are context-specific, which relates to specific phenomena. Hence, midrange theories provide conceptual frameworks to undertake empirical observation and models to guide managerial practices. Most of the theories currently used in business-to-business marketing research have these characteristics, so midrange theories characterize most conceptual frameworks.

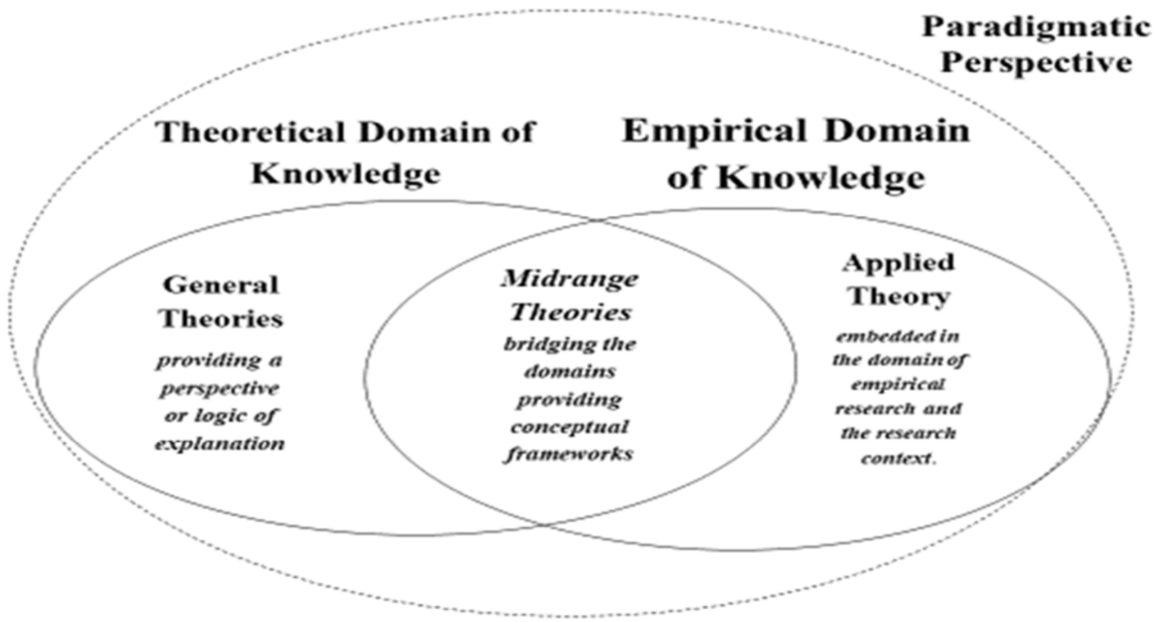
Applied theories: Applied theories are embedded in the domain of empirical research and the research context. While the focus of applied theories traditionally has been with empirical research, "theories-in-use" can play an important role (Argyris & Schon, 1974). "Theories-in-use" (TIU) recognize that practicing managers, customers, and other stakeholders in a service system use theory.

Zeithaml et al. (2020) argue that the TIU approach should be used to create theory that is developed from the mental models used by marketing stakeholders and thereby specific to the marketing issue being studied. The TIU approach builds on constructs, which are guided by marketing practitioners and grounded in marketing-specific contexts. Accordingly, this approach produces conceptual frameworks that is not only meaningful to marketing stakeholders, but can be communicated to them in language they use. Zeithaml et al. (2020) point out that this approach contrasts with the more commonly used approach of basing marketing theory on established academic theories developed in related disciplines. The authors note that this traditional approach limits the researcher's ability to find new, interesting marketing phenomena, ultimately widening the disconnect between academics and practitioners of marketing (Reibstein et al., 2009).

It has further been argued that neither traditional academic theory building, nor the TIU approach, optimally guides academics and practitioners in co-producing knowledge that is mutually beneficial (Crespin-Mazet & Ingemansson-Havenvid, 2020). Academics and practitioners inherently have different interests and contexts and require different kinds of knowledge (Di Benedetto et al., 2019). To bridge this divide, the solution is to co-produce knowledge that is useful to both groups; this issue is known as the knowledge production problem (van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). To solve this problem, the interaction between academics and practitioners should produce context-specific knowledge; this knowledge will be useful to the extent that it can be combined with other contextual resources (Håkansson & Waluszewski, 2007). That is, both academics and practitioners should bring their own knowledge, competencies, and partner networks to their collaboration so that knowledge is not just co-produced, but also can be used and further produced in other contexts over time (Crespin-Mazet & Ingemansson-Havenvid, 2020).

In Figure 2, we outline the domains of knowledge at three levels of theoretical abstraction. Midrange theory can be seen as the intermediary (bridging) body of theory that interfaces between the empirical and theoretical domains and hence are the foundation for conceptual frameworks. Within the theoretical and empirical domains, it is recognized that the boundaries between marketing and other management disciplines overlap. Thus, the theorizing processes in business-to-business marketing research can draw on these different disciplines.

Figure 2: Domains of Knowledge and Levels of Theory



Source: Lindgreen et al. (2020, p. 2)

The theorizing process for developing conceptual frameworks typically results in advancement of midrange theories and consists of the interplay between general theories and applied theories. However, prior to this theorizing process, it is essential to recognize the paradigmatic perspective that informs the theorizing process. As discussed by Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and van der Borgh (2020b), contemporary business-to-business marketing research mostly adopts a network or systems paradigmatic perspective leading to general theories that are inherently cross-disciplinary and drawing on sociological and institutional foundations. While a focal general theoretic perspective can interface directly with midrange theory to develop a conceptual framework, the theorizing process also can be informed from other general theoretic perspectives and other midrange theories.

Recently, Jaakkola (2020) has elaborated on the process of theorizing for developing conceptual frameworks. She distinguishes between two starting points. One way to start is with a focal phenomenon that is observable, but not adequately addressed in the existing research. The researcher inductively develops a conceptual framework (midrange theory) in terms of particular concepts that reflect the phenomena. Nenonen et al. (2017) recognize that insight about the focal phenomena can come not only from researchers' observations but can also be initiated with researchers interfacing with managers and other actors involved with practice. An alternative starting point for developing conceptual manuscripts begins with a focal (midrange) theory and extends and refines this theory to reflect the phenomena of interest better. The process can be enhanced by taking into account the meta-level conceptual system provided by the general theory. As discussed by Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and van der Borgh (2020b) and Brodie and Peters (2020), the process of theorizing for developing conceptual frameworks should not be considered linear, but should be seen as iterative, drawing on pathways.

3. STYLES FOR DEVELOPING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

To identify the different ways for developing conceptual frameworks, Cornelissen (2017) examined articles published in the *Academy of Management Review*. While he did not find one straightforward formula, he does identify three styles:

1. *Proposition-based style*: The statement of theoretical propositions that introduces new constructs and cause-effect relationships.
2. *Narrative-based style*: The specification of a process model that lays out a set of mechanisms explaining events and outcomes.
3. *Typology-based style:* The specification of a typology that interrelates different dimensions to flesh out new constructs and causal interactions.

To develop guidelines for these styles, Cornelissen (2017) went through the reviewer reports and editorial letters for all of the *Academy of Management Review* articles he had handled as the editor for this journal. These styles and associated guidelines apply to advance the craft of developing conceptual frameworks. We also draw on four alternative templates for conceptual research design identified by Jaakkola (2020): *Theory Synthesis, Theory Adaptation, Typology*, and *Model* that can guide the theorizing process for developing conceptual frameworks. Next, we will discuss the three styles identified by Cornelissen (2017).

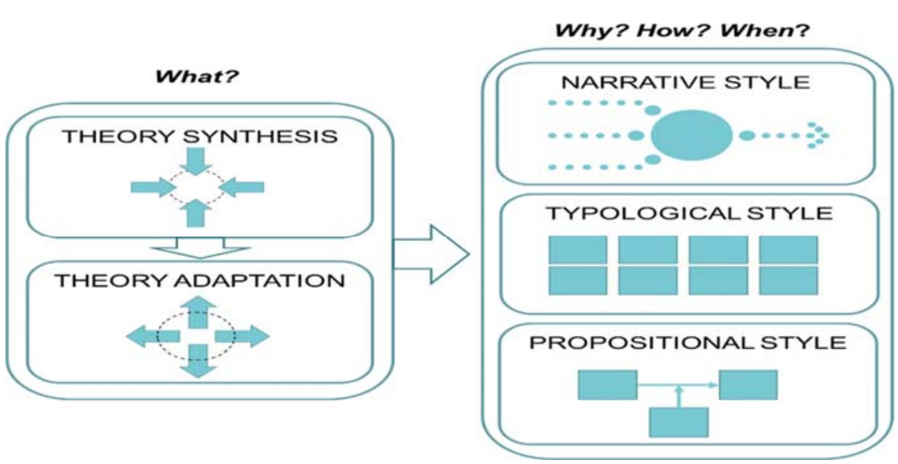
The *propositional style* refers to a theoretical framework that outlines a set of formally stated theoretical propositions (Cornelissen, 2017). These propositions can introduce new constructs and cause-effect relationships. This type of article develops a conceptual framework that takes the form a research model detailing the antecedents, outcomes, and contingencies related to the focal construct (MacInnis, 2011). The propositional style suggests making claims about causal relationships and specifying testable relationships. However, Cornelissen (2017) suggests that insightful conceptual frameworks should make propositions that cover novel theoretical ground rather than merely summarize prior literature. The creative scope of such arguments is wider in articles that present the conceptual framework as their primary outcome, drawing on theoretical or empirical domain of knowledge to model emerging phenomena instead of testing well-charted constructs (Yadav 2010). The researcher should carefully justify the choice and role of different sources of knowledge in building the propositions: typically, the literature that addresses key elements of the phenomenon/concept to be explained is informed by another theory that enables the explanation of relationships between the studied variables (Jaakkola, 2020).

The narrative-based style of developing conceptual frameworks focuses on specifying a process model that lays out a set of mechanisms explaining events and outcomes (Cornelissen, 2017). This style represents a form of theorizing that emphasizes narrative reasoning that seeks to unveil “big picture” patterns, connections, and mechanisms rather than specific causal relationships (Cornelissen, 2017; Delbridge and Fiss, 2013). This type of conceptual framework is often a process model involving the dynamics of constructs and critical events or turning points for the phenomenon. The framework contributes to extant knowledge by not only describing what is known, but making novel arguments about how a concept changes, the processes by which it operates, or why and how elements of a process lead to a particular outcome (Cornelissen, 2017; MacInnis, 2011). This type of framework can develop by synthesizing existing literature across multiple theoretical perspectives to form novel, higher-order understanding. It can also come from problematizing an existing theory and resolving the identified shortcomings by introducing a new theoretical lens that enables organizing the elements of the studied process in a better way (Jaakkola, 2020).

The typology-based style aims to logically and causally combine different constructs into a coherent and explanatory set of types (Cornelissen, 2017). A typology provides a more precise and nuanced understanding of a phenomenon or concept, as the typology dimensionalizes or categorizes existing knowledge of a phenomenon or construct (Jaakkola, 2020; MacInnis, 2011). As a theoretical framework, a typology delineates how variants of an entity differ and may help to recognize the entity’s differing antecedents, manifestations, or effects (MacInnis, 2011) and causal relationships (Fiss, 2011). When building a typology, the researcher should carefully justify the logic of identifying dimensions of types. The dimensions of a typology can be identified by applying some general theory, or other midrange theories that are equipped to explain logically the differences between variants of the concept (Jaakkola, 2020). Another option is to tease out relevant dimensions through iterations between theories and knowledge in the empirical domain.

The three styles presented by Cornelissen (2017) ultimately aim at explaining relationships between concepts to answer questions *why*, *how*, and *when* something happens. The propositional style results in a research model depicting cause-effect relationships; the typology outlines variants of a concept that have different drivers, outcomes, or contingencies; and the narrative style lays out sequences of events (Figure 3). According to Jaakkola (2020), conceptual research also can be designed to increase understanding, thus answering the '*what*' question. A *theory synthesis* framework seeks to achieve conceptual integration across multiple theories or fragmented literature streams, to offer and enhance the view of a concept or phenomenon by linking previously unconnected elements in a novel way (Jaakkola, 2020). Theory synthesis frameworks summarize and integrate existing knowledge into a manageable whole and produce a new higher-order understanding of the concept under study (MacInnis, 2011). Another approach is to broaden, extend, or amend an existing theory by using other theories. *Theory adaptation* aims at revising extant conceptualizations by introducing alternative frames of reference to propose a novel, enhanced perspective (Jaakkola, 2020; MacInnis, 2011). For example, the researcher might draw from practical insights, that is, TIU, or other midrange theories to argue that an existing conceptualization is insufficient or conflicted, and suggest that broadening of perspective or scope is needed to align better the concept to its purpose (Jaakkola, 2020; Nenonen et al., 2017). Research aiming at theory synthesis or adaptation often serves as a stepping stone towards building frameworks that can explain (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Styles of Theorizing for Building Conceptual Frameworks



4. EXAMPLES

In this section, we discuss three business-to-business marketing studies, each of which is illustrative of one of the styles of developing conceptual frameworks (Cornelissen, 2017).

5.1. Proposition-based Style

The first study, by Du et al. (2013), examines the interrelationship between leadership styles and institutional corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices. The authors noted the critical role of organizational leadership style in developing organizational strategy, yet the shortage of research of how leadership style affects the practice of CSR. In particular, the authors investigated the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership styles and organizational CSR outcomes.

Du et al. (2013) developed a theoretical framework (Figure 4) based on their literature review of the literature on transformational leadership. They proposed three testable hypotheses, which can be summarized as follow:

First, transformational leaders are most likely to recognize the interrelationships and interdependencies between the organization's stakeholders, including the local community and the natural environment. Therefore:

H1: Transformational (not transactional) leadership is positively associated with an organization's institutional CSR practices.

Second, stakeholder-oriented marketing provides a wider environmental view, which provides deeper knowledge of the organization's stakeholders and their concerns. Therefore, transformational leaders can form even stronger relationships with stakeholders, and can work with stakeholders to provide CSR practices that better suit the needs of the stakeholders. Du et al. (2013) hypothesized a moderation effect:

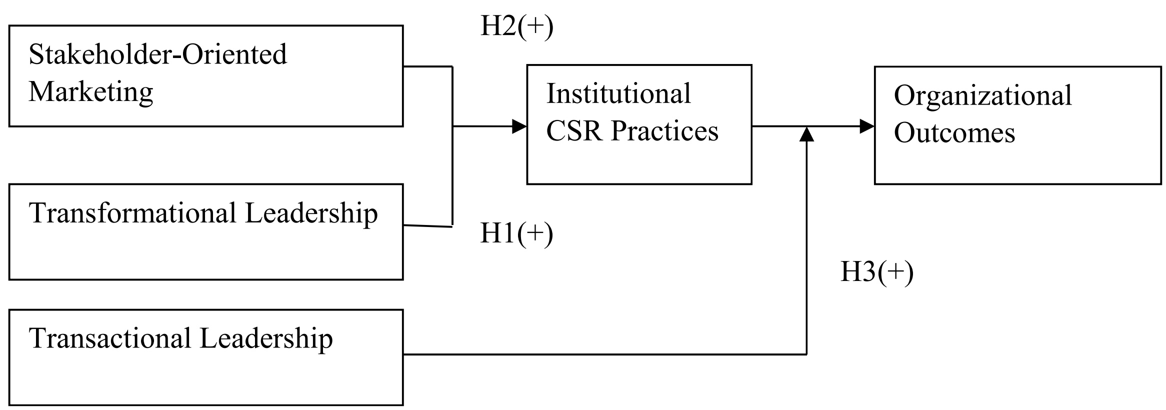
H2: Stakeholder-oriented marketing positively moderates the relationship between transformational leadership and institutional CSR practices (that is, the relationship is more positive for organizations effectively practicing stakeholder-oriented marketing).

Finally, the value provided to secondary stakeholders is a societal impact allowing institutional CSR to generate positive organizational outcomes. If the organization uses its core competencies appropriately, the organization will be able to effectively implement its corporate CSR initiatives. This is also modeled as a moderation effect:

H3: Transactional (not transformational) leadership positively moderates the relationship between institutional CSR practices and organizational outcomes (that is, the relationship is more favorable for organizations with higher transactional leadership).

Based on a survey of managers in 440 U.S. organizations, Du et al. (2013) found support for their new conceptual model. Transformational leadership was positively related to institutional CSR practices, and stakeholder-oriented marketing did moderate this positive relationship. By contrast, transactional leadership positively moderated the relationship between institutional CSR practices and organizational outcomes. Thus, all hypotheses were supported, and the authors concluded that transformational and transactional leadership styles affect institutional CSR practices differently.

Figure 4. Conceptual Framework of Du et al. (2013)



Source: Adapted from Du et al. (2013, p. 160).

Du et al. (2013) also identified several important managerial implications derived from their conceptual model. Transformational leadership is most appropriate for initiating CSR practices, while transactional leadership may have an advantage in deriving the organizational benefits from these practices. The authors noted that both types of leadership are needed in order for the organization to achieve the “circle of virtue” (the organization investing in CSR achieves its business objectives and therefore, can ensure sustained CSR investment). The authors recommended that managers should consider how both transformational and transactional leadership can be implemented. Also, stakeholder-oriented marketing has significant implications in that organizational members must keep the welfare of all stakeholders in mind and create an organizational climate that fosters CSR practices. Stakeholder-oriented marketing supports transformational leadership and increases its effectiveness in promoting CSR practices. This finding suggests that transformational leaders should consider developing complementary capabilities that help them attain their institutional CSR objectives.

The Du et al. (2013) study is a clear illustration of Cornelissen’s (2017) proposition-based style. The authors identified a significant gap in the literature: the organizational leadership literature had not investigated the effects of leadership on organizational CSR policy despite the growing importance of the latter. They proposed a new conceptual framework, built on organizational leadership theory, which included new cause-and-effect relationships among constructs from leadership theory to organizational CSR practices and outcomes. It is also notable that the authors employed the remedies recommended by Cornelissen (2017) for the proposition-based style. They develop and empirically test their conceptual model. They also use a broad theoretical perspective that required cross-disciplinary inputs from different business disciplines (organizational behaviour, marketing, and corporate strategy).

4.2. Narrative-based Style

To illustrate the narrative-based style, consider Vallaster et al. (2020), a multiple-case qualitative study of for-profit hybrid organizations. Due to their hybrid nature, sustainability-driven hybrids design organizational activities in line with social and environmental objectives and economic objectives simultaneously, which lead to tension. The most successful hybrids will need to manage these tensions, yet the process by which they accomplish this has been under-researched in the literature. A much greater understanding of this process is warranted, from the viewpoints of both individual actions and collective organizational practices. To gain the required depth of understanding, Vallaster et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study of for-profit hybrids.

Based on a review of the literature, the authors developed an initial conceptual framework. The existing literature discussed the tensions found within for-profit organizations attempting to transform their industrial and social environments, identifying four categories: learning, belonging, organizing, and performing tensions. To handle these tensions, organizations need to develop the ability to deal with specific issues that arise from each of these four categories; the literature provided some discussion of dynamic capabilities required for the organization to integrate, build, and transform internal and external resources in response to changing environmental conditions. Specifically, the literature mentioned sensing, seizing, and transforming dynamic capabilities. Nevertheless, little research on how these dynamic capabilities are developed and applied by for-profit hybrids was found.

To assess empirically how actors at the individual and collective levels develop these capabilities in a for-profit hybrid setting, they used practice-based theory to conceptualize the practices (individual and collective behaviors, activities, and processes) undertaken by actors to address each of the specific tensions and, ultimately, to create economic, social, and environmental value.

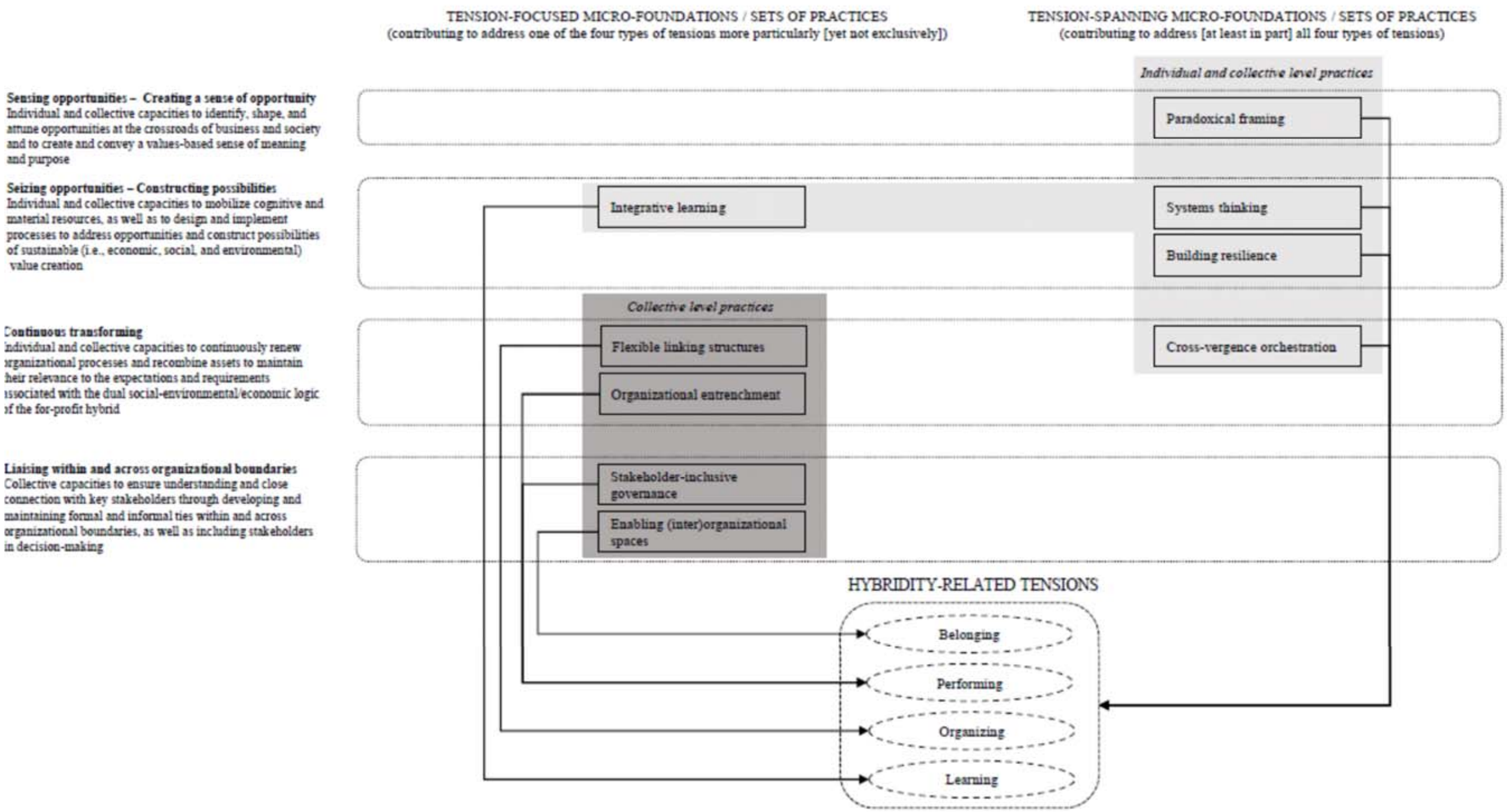
Next, Vallaster et al. (2020) applied a theory-generative approach, carrying out a qualitative study comprising several stages over a 15-month period. Each stage comprised several workshops. Stage A was designed to understand industry context, and experience in handling multiple goals. During Stage B, middle managers were interviewed about the activities, processes, and capabilities involved in developing a for-profit hybrid orientation. Stage C was devoted to identifying challenges, which had arisen from the initiatives undertaken. Post-workshop interviews, personal reflections, and diaries were used to take notes and to drive discussion at upcoming workshops. Finally, in Stage D, supplementary interviews with managers from other for-profit hybrids were conducted.

The theory-generative approach involved several phases. First, initial first-order codes were identified by the authors from the interview findings. Second, related concepts across case organizations were identified and linked by the authors, creating second-order concepts. These concepts primarily involved how the respondents addressed the tensions arising from their organization's hybrid orientation. Third, the authors conducted a cross-case analysis to identify consistent patterns. Finally, the authors completed the theoretical framework by refocusing on the hybrid-related tensions identified in the existing literature, and determining how dynamic capabilities and micro-foundations addressed these tensions.

The result of the analysis was a new conceptual framework of the micro-foundations of the dynamic capabilities of for-profit hybrids. Figure 5 shows the four dynamic capabilities of for-profit hybrids (sensing, seizing, transforming, and liaising; extant literature had not previously discussed the dynamic capability of liaising), and how these dynamic capabilities are supported by micro-foundations. Table 1 indicates the micro-foundations that were identified and how they aligned with specific for-profit hybrid tensions. The authors also draw several managerial implications. For-profit hybrid managers should recognize the need to constantly nurture both the individual and collective practices that support the micro-foundations. It is also important to monitor hybridity-related tensions since not all practices will be suitable for all business decisions. The organization should be able to capitalize on economic opportunities and also identify sustainability-oriented solutions.

In sum, Vallaster et al. (2020) provides a good illustration of the narrative-based style of conceptual model. The authors started with a ‘theory adaptation’ approach (Jaakkola 2020), as they combined the dynamic capabilities theory with practice theory to conceptualize how actors develop capabilities, and then informed this theory-based understanding with knowledge from the empirical domain (cf. Nenonen et al., 2017). As a result, the authors developed a useful managerial framework that presents the underlying micro-foundations leading to dynamic capabilities. Managers of for-profit hybrids can make use of the framework to improve current practices, identify which practices are lacking, and ultimately support sustainable value creation. While some components of the model were available in the existing literature, the process by which for-profit hybrids could best manage ongoing tensions was not yet well understood. This conceptual framework helps managers understand the individual actions and collective practices that best support environmental and social objectives.

Figure 5: Addressing Hybridity-Related Tensions through Micro-Foundations of Dynamic Capabilities



Source: Vallaster et al. (2020, in print).

Table 1: Micro-foundations of Dynamic Capabilities of For-Profit Hybrids

Micro-foundations	**Individual or collective**
Sensing opportunities: Creating a sense of opportunity	
Experiential / grounded scouting	*Individual*
Attention to functional core	*Individual*
Paradoxical framing	*Individual & collective*
Seizing opportunities: Constructing possibilities	
Systems thinking	*Individual & collective*
Bending institutional norms	*Individual & collective*
Integrative learning	*Individual & collective*
Building resilience	*Individual & collective*
Continuous transforming	
Cross-vergence orchestration	*Individual & collective*
Flexible linking structures	*Collective*
Organizational entrenchment	*Individual & collective*
Liaising within and across organizational boundaries	
Enabling (inter) organizational spaces	*Collective*
Stakeholder-inclusive governance	*Collective*

Source: After Vallaster et al. (2020, in print).

Notes: Shaded cells relate to practices and micro-foundations that do not contribute to addressing hybridity-related tensions.

4.3.Typology-based Style

In this study of purchasing practices, by Lindgreen et al. (2013), the authors develop a new framework and a measurement instrument. The purchasing literature usually assumes two categories of purchasing practices (transactional and relational), though, in practice, purchasing often involves both types. The issue of how and why organizations choose one type or the other, or to combine types, and how these choices affect organizational performance is not well understood. To remedy this situation, Lindgreen et al. (2013) needed to develop a new framework, based on the existing literature, which includes a broader range of purchasing practices, as well as a new measurement instrument to measure organizational purchase practice with greater precision.

The existing literature described two purchasing management practices. Transaction purchasing emphasizes the aggressive and continuous search for new suppliers to achieve the best terms. In contrast, network purchasing refers to the organization relying on a more extensive organizational system for purchasing from suppliers. Lindgreen et al. (2013) suggested adding two practices. Electronic purchasing refers to the use of the Internet or other one-to-one or one-to-many technologies to support the supplier relationship, and interactive purchasing refers to interpersonal interaction between organizational employees and suppliers. Further, Lindgreen et al. (2013) identified eight formative indicators, which together describe the four different kinds of purchasing practices. These formative indicators are: purpose of exchange, managerial intent, nature of communication, type of contact, duration of exchange relationship, formality of exchange, managerial focus, and managerial investment. The authors also identified a general indicator that provides an overall view of each purchasing practice. Table 2 shows the four purchasing practices and how they are characterized by the formative indicators.

The authors surveyed 202 purchasing managers in the U.S. Each organization was scored on each of the eight indicators, for all four purchasing practices. By summing the eight indicators for each purchasing practice, an index was created, which indicates the extent to which each organization practices transaction, electronic, interactive, and network purchasing. The purchasing practice types are not mutually exclusive, so, as a result, each organization will have its characteristic mix of indices.

Lindgreen et al. (2013) used cluster analysis to group organizations into configurations of purchasing practice, based on these indices. This procedure resulted in a new conceptual framework of purchasing practices, consisting of four identifiable clusters or patterns:

Transactional configuration: High on transaction purchasing index and low on the other three indices.

Integrative relational configuration: Low on transaction purchasing index and high on the other three indices.

Interpersonal dyadic configuration: Medium on transaction purchasing index, high on interactive purchasing index, and low on the other indices.

Interpersonal network configuration: Medium on transaction purchasing index, high on interactive purchasing and network purchasing indices, and low on electronic purchasing index.

The authors also gathered marketing performance outcomes (customer attraction, retention, and satisfaction, sales growth, and market share), as well as a financial performance outcome (profitability). Therefore, once the framework was in place, the authors were able to link purchasing practices to performance outcomes in a very detailed manner. For example:

Electronic purchasing practices needed to be combined with the interactive purchasing and network purchasing practices in order to achieve high levels of performance.

Many organizations are pluralistic; that is, they utilize two or more purchasing practices.

The organizations that use the integrative relational configuration outperform other organizations on all the marketing and financial performance outcome measures.

The organizations that use the integrative relational configuration outperform all or most other organizations on some of the specific formative indicators as well, such as supplier quality and delivery reliability. However, in the case of supplier lead time, there were no noticeable differences among the configurations.

Organizations tend to use interactive and network purchasing more with direct suppliers, and transactional purchasing more with indirect suppliers.

Lindgreen et al. (2013) were able to draw several critical managerial implications from their conceptual framework. A manager can, for example, set targets for each type of purchasing practice to use per cluster, and evaluate performance outcomes. Gaps between actual and target achievement levels can be identified, and ways to bridge the gaps can be discussed. Organizations can also use this information to specify (and, when necessary, adjust and re-specify) their strategies on how to achieve purchasing practice and performance outcomes.

In sum, this study effectively illustrates the typology-based style of Cornelissen (2017). The previous literature tended to view only two types of purchasing practices (transactional and relational), without delving into how the organization chooses one or the other, or whether to mix types. Lindgreen et al. (2013) built on this literature stream and extended it in meaningful directions. First, the relational purchasing practices type was defined too broadly, so they essentially split this type into three new purchasing categories (electronic, interactive, and network purchasing) each with different characteristics. The authors identified a set of specific formative indicators, developed a new measurement instrument, and empirically developed a typology of purchasing patterns based on cluster analysis. Finally, they identified relationships between the purchasing patterns and performance outcomes. Overall, the new cluster-based typology resulted in a more precise view of purchasing practices and key performance metrics, making an important conceptual contribution and offering actionable managerial implications as well.

Table 2. Indicators Pertaining to Purchasing Practices

Aspects	Transactional Perspective	Relational Perspective		
	Transaction Purchasing	Electronic Purchasing	Interactive Purchasing	Network Purchasing
Purpose of exchange: When dealing with our direct suppliers, our purpose is to:	achieve cost savings or other 'financial' measure(s) of performance (monetary transactions)	create information-generating dialogue with many identified suppliers	build a long-term relationship with specific supplier(s)	form relationships with a number of organizations in our supply market(s) or wider purchasing system
Nature of communication: Our communication with direct suppliers can be characterized as:	our organization using undifferentiated communications with all suppliers	our organization using technology to communicate with and possibly among many individual suppliers	individuals at various levels in our organization personally interacting with individual suppliers	senior managers networking with other managers from a variety of organizations in our supply market(s) or wider purchasing system
Type of contact: Our organization's contact with our direct suppliers is:	arm's-length, impersonal with no individualized or personal contact	interactive via technology such as the Internet	interpersonal (e.g. involving one-to-one interaction between people)	across firms in the broader network (from impersonal to interpersonal contact)
Duration of exchange: The type of contact with our direct suppliers is characterized as:	transactions that are discrete or one-off (i.e. not ongoing)	technology-based interactivity that is ongoing and real-time	interpersonal interaction that is ongoing	contact with people in our organization and wider purchasing system that is ongoing
Formality of exchange: When people from our organization meet with our direct suppliers, it is:	mainly at a formal business level	mainly at a formal level, yet customized and / or personalized via interactive technologies	at both a formal business level and informal social level on a one-to-one basis	at both a formal business level and informal social level in a wider organizational system / network
Managerial intent: Our purchasing exchanges are intended to:	continuously search for new suppliers to find the best deal (i.e., low prices)	create two-way, technology-enabled data exchanges with our suppliers	develop cooperative relationships with our suppliers	coordinate activities between ourselves, suppliers, and other parties in our wider purchasing and supply system (e.g., second-tier suppliers, key customers, service providers, and other organizations with which we interact through our purchasing activities)
Managerial focus: Our purchasing strategy is focused on issues related to:	the purchase item and its price	managing IT-enabled relationships with many individual suppliers	one-to-one relationships with suppliers, or individuals in supplier organizations we deal with	the network of relationships between individuals and organizations in our wider supply system
Managerial investment: Our purchasing resources (i.e. people, time, and money) are invested in:	specifying products, negotiations, ordering, and expediting activities	operational assets (IT, website, logistics) and functional systems integration (e.g., purchasing with IT)	establishing and building personal relationships with individual suppliers	developing our organization's network relationships within our supply market(s) or wider purchasing system
General indicator: Overall, our organization's general approach to our direct suppliers (of product-related items) involves:	using aggressive sourcing (continuously search for new suppliers) to obtain purchase items at the most favorable conditions	using the Internet and other interactive technologies to create and mediate data exchanges between our organization and our suppliers	developing personal interactions between employees and individual suppliers	positioning organization within a wider organizational system or network

Source: Lindgreen et al. (2013, p. 76).

5. GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING STRONG CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

In a previous editorial, Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and van der Borgh (2020a) discussed which types of articles typically get cited. One type of article that tends to get highly cited is the article that introduces a new conceptual framework. Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and Naudé (2019) consider the necessary conditions that determine the success of authors' conceptual and theoretical development. In a summary of these conditions, the authors highlight the following points:

- Develop a clear and convincing logic to their theory so that researchers can see how the theory fits in the field,
- Define concepts clearly and concisely so that other researchers can use them in their own research,
- Ensure that there is a clear rationale for the conceptual development so that other researchers can understand why they should use the concepts, methods, or theories,
- Ensure that propositions and hypotheses are specific, well-argued, grounded in theory, and not tautological.

For any type of conceptual framework, it is elementary that the authors explicate and justify the choice of theories and concepts, as well as the role those different domains of knowledge play in the analysis (Jaakkola, 2020). There is no single best template for building a conceptual framework. Still, authors can use general theories, midrange theories, and theories-in-use in many different ways, as long as they make their approach clear for the reader. For example, the article should communicate if empirical data was used to illustrate a theoretical framework developed through conceptual analysis, or if the elements of the framework are derived from empirical data.

In an examination of how to undertake cross-disciplinary research, Lindgreen, Di Benedetto, Brodie, and van der Borgh (2020b) recognize that there are multiple pathways to develop midrange theory and hence undertake empirical research. First, the focal general theoretic perspective can interface directly with midrange theory. The second option is that other general theoretic perspectives provide pathways that can lead to other midrange theories, which then leads to a focal midrange theory that can be used in business-to-business research (Lindgreen et al., 2020b, p. 1).

One pathway to develop midrange theory is by having managerial practices inform research processes. For a more in-depth discussion of this pathway, we refer to the editorial by Lindgreen et al. (2020b). However, little is known about university-business collaborations

(Perkman et al., 2013). Thus, Di Benedetto et al. (2019) discuss this type of collaboration including, for example, offering advice to business managers about how to collaborate with university academics.

In addition to these more general guidelines, Table 3 outlines more specific guidelines related to the three styles discussed in this editorial.

Table 3: Three Styles of Developing Theoretical Frameworks and Associated Guidelines

Attributes of Each Style	**Proposition-based Style**	**Narrative-based Style**	**Typology-based Style**
Definition	The statement of theoretical propositions that introduces new constructs and cause-effect relationships	The specification of a process model that lays out a set of mechanisms explaining events and outcomes	The specification of a typology that interrelates different dimensions to flesh out new constructs and causal interactions
Basic form	Identify cause-effect relationships that act as broad signposts and implications for further research	Provide generalized causal mechanism, as the underlying storyline of a process model	Explains the fuzzy nature of many subjects by combining different constructs into a coherent and explanatory set of types
Common problems	• Propositions are too narrow in scope and merely summarize the prior literature • Propositions include multiple clauses • Propositions lack detail on the causal agent	• Narrative and process model are too descriptive • Narrative and process model lack explanatory detail • Narrative features stylized arguments and claims (lacking nuance and contingent variation) • Narrative features complex compounds and phrases as constructs	• Typology is descriptive and does not offer multidimensional ideal types • Typology only systematizes and summarizes existing research but lacks explanation • Typology features various degrees of causal entanglement (including circularity and tautology)
Remedies	• Broaden the scope of the propositions and develop an original line of argument, with a novel set of assumptions as theorized grounds • Develop the arguments first, before formalizing them into propositions	• Elaborate the underlying conceptual linkages of a process model, foregrounding a clear mechanism or set of mechanisms • Add details and more • contingent variation to the overall narrative, strengthening its explanatory potential	• Identify whether the proposed typology has a review or theory contribution, or both • Develop the typology from a theoretical angle, incorporating multiple theoretical dimensions • Draw out patterns of causality (using fuzzy set reasoning) and explicate the basic line of argument

Adapted from Cornelissen (2017)

As outlined in Table 3, the common problem with these theorizing styles for developing conceptual manuscripts was that the theory used is too narrow in scope. Thus, the resulting conceptual development lacks strong theoretical foundations. Cornelissen's (2017) remedies for all three theorizing styles are to introduce a stronger theorizing process that facilitates the interface between general theory and applied theory and to explicitly recognize the social causal mechanisms that underpin midrange theory (Mason et al., 2013).

6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this editorial is to draw attention to the important but demanding craft of developing insightful theoretical frameworks. We urge authors to consider the role of different domains of knowledge in building their frameworks, and explain their approach clearly in the article. Too often, reviewers face manuscripts have conceptual frameworks based on descriptive literature reviews, which devoid of more in-depth conceptual analysis or integration. Hopefully, business-to-business marketing scholars will be inspired by the different styles for building theoretical frameworks discussed in this editorial and make use of the guidelines and research design considerations we have outlined.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This editorial is part in a series of the co-editors-in-chiefs' reflections on important aspects of planning, undertaking, and publishing research in business-to-business marketing management, reflections that should help prospective and early-career researchers eventually to see their findings published in *Industrial Marketing Management* and other top journals.

REFERENCES

Argyris, C. & Schon, D. (1974). *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness.* Oxford, U.K.: Jossey-Bass.

Brodie R.J. & Peters, L. (2020). Increasing contribution in service research: fresh thinking about the process of theorizing. *Journal of Services Marketing*, in press.

Corley, K.G. & Gioia, D.A. (2011). Building theory about theory building: what constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, *36*(1), 12–32.

Cornelissen, J. (2017). Editor's comments: Developing propositions, a process model, or a typology? Addressing the challenges of writing theory without a boilerplate. *Academy of Management Review*, *42*(1), 1–9.

Crespin-Mazet, F. & Ingemansson-Havenvit, M (2020). Rethinking the theory-practice divide: How academia-industry collaboration contributes to theorizing. *Industrial Marketing Management*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.01.003.

Delbridge, R. & Fiss, P. C. (2013). Editors' comments: Styles of theorizing and the social organization of knowledge. *Academy of Management Review, 38*(3), 325–331.

Di Benedetto, C.A., Lindgreen, A., Storgaard, M., & Clarke, A.H. (2019). Editorial: How to collaborate really well with practitioners. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 82, 1–8.

Du, S., Swaen, V., Lindgreen, A., & Sen, S. (2013). The roles of leadership styles in corporate social responsibility. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *114*(1), 155–169.

Dubois, A. & Gadde, L.-E. (2002). Systematic combining: an abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, *55*(7), 553–560.

Fiss, P.C. (2011). Building better causal theories: a fuzzy set approach to typologies in organization research. *Academy of Management Journal*, *54*(2), 393–420.

Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A.L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishers.

Håkansson, H. & Waluszewski, A. (eds.) (2007). *Knowledge and Innovation in Business and Industry: The Importance of Using Others*. London: Routledge.

Jaakkola, E. (2020). Designing conceptual articles: four approaches. *AMS Review*, doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0.

King, A.W. & Lepak, D. (2011). Editors' comments: myth busting—what we hear and what we've learned about *AMR*. *Academy of Management Review*, *36*(2), 207–214.

Lindgreen, A., Di Benedetto, C.A., Brodie, R.J., and van der Borgh, M. (2020a), Editorial: How to get great research cited, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *89*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.03.023.

Lindgreen, A., Di Benedetto, C.A., Brodie, R.J., and van der Borgh, M. (2020b), Editorial: How to undertake great cross-disciplinary research, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *90*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.03.025.

MacInnis, D.J. (2011). A framework for conceptual contributions in marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, *75*(4), 136–154.

Mason, K., Easton, G., & Lenny, P. (2013). Causal social mechanisms: from the what to the why. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *42*(3), 347–355.

Nenonen, S., Brodie, R.J., Storbacka, K., & Peters, L.D. (2017). Theorizing with managers: how to achieve both academic rigor and practical relevance? *European Journal of Marketing*, *51*(7/8), 1130–1152.

Reibstein, D. J., Day, G., & Wind, J. (2009). Guest editorial: Is marketing academic losing its way? *Journal of Marketing*, *73*(4), 1–3.

Strauss, A.L. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Vallaster, C., Maon, F., Lindgreen, A., & Vanhamme, J. (2020). Serving multiple masters: the role of micro-foundations of dynamic capabilities in addressing tensions in for-profit hybrid organizations. *Organization Studies*, doi.org/10.1177/0170840619856034.

van de Ven, A.H. & Johnson, P.E. (2006). Knowledge for theory and practice. *Academy of Management Review*, *31*(4), 802–821.

Weick, K.E. (1995). What theory is not theorizing is. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *40*(3), 385–390.

Yadav, M.S. (2010). The decline of conceptual articles and implications for knowledge development. *Journal of Marketing*, *74*(1), 1–19.

Zeithaml, V. A., Jaworski, B. J., Kohli, A. K., Tuli, K. R., Ulaga, W., & Zaltman, G. (2020). A theories-in-use approach to building marketing theory. *Journal of Marketing*, *84*(1), 32–51.