Tacit knowledge and the epistemology of expertise in strategic marketing management

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Abstract *Discusses issues concerning the relationship between codified marketing theory and practical strategic marketing expertise, particularly with respect to the importance of "tacit" or unarticulated knowledge. The trajectory of argument draws attention to the role of words as symbolic modelling devices and explores implications of this position for theorising marketing expertise. Makes use of a multidisciplinary perspective and draws material from work in cognitive science, the psychology of expertise and the philosophy of science. Sets the problematisation of practical theory in marketing within a broader context of a possible epistemological "crisis" of rationality in practical disciplines. The conclusion suggests that an epistemology of expertise for marketing management demands both theoretical and linguistic sophistication and implies a pedagogic shift towards a model of philosophic enquiry in marketing.*

Introduction

The idea that practical skill or expertise has a "tacit" or unarticulated dimension poses deep epistemological problems for practical subjects (see Polanyi, 1962; Goranzon and Florin, 1992). It entails asking questions such as what is it to be very good (an expert) at something? How might expertise in a practical field be modelled through talk and theory? Is this problematic? This paper seeks to introduce these questions in the context of marketing management at the strategic (i.e. non-routine, strategic management decision making) level. It does so by drawing on the extensive psychological literature on expertise (e.g. Reimann and Chi, 1989; Murphy and Wright, 1984) and it attempts to relate these findings to issues in the development of marketing theory (e.g. Hunt, 1991; O'Shaugnessy, 1992; Sheth *et al.,* 1988). In attempting this, the paper makes use of current work in the crossover between cognitive science and marketing (e.g. Moutinho and Brownlie, 1995; Wierenga, 1990; Talvinen, 1995) since this work is salutary in drawing attention to the philosophical and linguistic dilemmas which reveal themselves when academics try to extract the essence of marketing expertise. The underlying theme of the paper is epistemological, since it asks "what can we (academics) know and tell about the highest levels of expertise in strategic marketing management, and what is the rational basis of such knowing and telling?"

The discussion proceeds in four main sections. The first section places the consideration of a tacit dimension of expert marketing knowledge within a context of evolving debates in marketing theory. The second addresses some

philosophical implications of the position that expertise in strategic marketing management is a pre-linguistic socially mediated fact which is accessible to, yet somehow stands apart from, language. The third section introduces perspectives from cognitive science which bear heavily on the assumptions of this paper and which offer clear illustrations of the problems and possibilities of eliciting and codifying the knowledge which underlies practical expertise. Finally, the themes are brought together in a speculative model which suggests some possible conceptualisations of the tacit dimension in marketing management expertise. The conclusion suggests some possible directions for further research and theory development in strategic marketing management expertise.

The "tacit" and debates in marketing theory

The rigor of the theoretical basis underpinning academic marketing management has received its share of critical attention in recent years (see for example, Brownlie *et al.*, 1993, 1994; Hunt, 1991; Buttle, 1994; Weitz and Wensley, 1992; Deshpande, 1983). However, this lively debate has not to date been placed within the broader context of the equally vigorous current debate concerning the epistemology of practical knowledge (Goranzon and Florin, 1992; Goranzon and Josefson, 1988). This latter debate involves cognitive scientists and philosophers of education, science and knowledge and covers the entire scope of the practical professional disciplines. Within marketing, these issues concern the acquisition and performance of high level expertise at the strategic level (Hackley, 1996; Hackley and Kitchen, 1997). A premise of this discussion is that the connection between theory and expert practice in academic marketing tends to be assumed rather than specified:

> ...strategic marketing theory has assigned a primacy to the product and its associated marketing mix. Such theory has therefore only provided guidelines for incremental product repositioning and marketing mix improvement, and spectacularly successful strategic marketing acts continue to be assigned to the category of "genius" or "art" – categories beyond modernist analytical reach. (Cova and Svanfeldt, 1993, pp. 297-310 in Firat *et al.*, 1995).

This apparent neglect of a critical aspect of marketing management seems anomalous in a practical discipline so unforgiving in its competitive environment. It is axiomatic in academic strategic marketing management that firms unable to maintain a perpetual state of excellence in their marketing functions will be overtaken in the competitive race. Maintaining this state of excellence requires expertise in strategic marketing management. The application of findings from educational and cognitive psychology, and strategic management, to marketing management has developed a basis for conceptualising the strategic marketing practitioner task environment as one which presents complex and ill-structured problems which emerge within turbulence and uncertainty (Hackley, 1996; Hackley and Kitchen, 1997) and in general management (Mintzberg *et al.,* 1976). The highest levels of expertise in this domain, as in other professional domains, depend upon an interaction of

domain relevant knowledge, experience and creativity (above references and Reimann and Chi, 1989; Murphy and Wright, 1984; Henry, 1991). Large amounts of marketing knowledge are codified in popular texts and constitute a public discourse. However, much of the knowledge underpinning practical marketing expertise may be tacit, implicit in the day-to-day problem solving of strategic marketing practitioners but difficult to elicit from experts or to codify in public symbols. This is a problematic feature not simply of marketing but of every practical discipline (Goranzon and Josefson, 1988; Polanyi, 1962). This implies that high level expertise in marketing involves cognitive performance which goes beyond marketings codified body of knowledge.

Something is known about the acquisition of professional practical expertise. The interactive function of knowledge, experience, time and individual predisposition is well researched in fields which can be relatively routinised (e.g. Murphy and Wright, 1984; Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986; Anderson, 1980; Bhaskar and Simon, 1977; Cormier and Hagman, 1987; and review with respect to marketing in Hackley and Kitchen, 1997). However, it is problematic whether codified knowledge bases of practical disciplines deal adequately with the question of how expertise may be acquired, promoted and fostered through theoretical learning. Marketing is one such practical discipline and one that has endured a more thorough going internal debate concerning its knowledge claims than many others. The influence this debate has had on marketing's curriculum and research agenda is difficult to establish (e.g. Buttle, 1994). Mainstream managerial marketing discourse is replete with normative models of strategic managerial marketing practice such as the product life cycle (Levitt, 1960; Kotler, 1994; Patten, 1959), the "four Ps" marketing mix conceptual framework (McCarthy, 1981), models of strategic portfolio management and competitive strategy (Porter, 1980; Kotler 1994; Ansoff, 1965; Abell, 1978), not to mention many generic, generalised descriptive models of buyer behaviour, advertising communication, product conceptualisation and so on. The issue of the extent to which these models constitute a suitable theoretical basis for the practical discipline of marketing management has been extensively debated from a variety of positions within academic and practical marketing (e.g. O'Shaugnessy, 1992; Hunt, 1991; Brownlie *et al.,* 1993, 1994; Hackley, 1998). The question of the heuristic power of these models or explanatory sketches is an important one since the most prominent and powerful school of thought within academic marketing is the managerial school of marketing (Sheth *et al.,* 1988). From the perspective of this school, marketing is conceived primarily as a managerial function serving the instrumental needs of the firm. The practical utility of the marketing knowledge base is therefore an issue that is critical to the integrity of this view of marketing. However, the question of how, and to what extent, managerial marketing's theoretical models promote, re-produce and frame practical expertise in the domain has not been directly addressed in academic marketing. The normative bias in mainstream managerial marketing theory can perhaps be accounted for by the prominence of the managerial school. However, the

critical literature argues that this normative bias is not adequately substantiated. How might an appreciation of the tacit, unarticulated aspects of expert knowledge contribute to marketing management theory?

Tacit and public knowledge in academic marketing
Philosophical questions of marketing science
In this paper the "tacit" dimension of practical knowledge refers to those particulars of action which are necessarily omitted, to varying degrees, from abstracted theoretical descriptions, yet upon which the successful accomplishment of practical action depends. This, incidentally, is not to imply that the metaphysical "space" between the world of concepts and the world of sense experience can be adequately bridged by marketing theory. It is meant to suggest that practical talk and theorising (about marketing management) cannot afford to assume that this metaphorical space is irrelevant, or that the nature of it is unproblematic. To take a simple example, the marketing "mix" analogy (McCarthy, 1981) is a ubiquitous feature in the most popular marketing texts and courses. While the "mix" offers a convenient and simple way of talking, by analogy, about things a marketing manager might have to consider in a given marketing situation, it nevertheless constitutes a verbal model which cannot reproduce the experiential dimension of dealing very effectively with such issues. The situational particulars of any given marketing situation, which are the very elements through and with which high level expertise must be practised, remain tacit in such a model. It cannot replicate the situational particulars which frame practical action, and the more case detail that is added to a teaching situation, the less likely the case will be to resemble any practical marketing situation. Consequently, the normative dimension to marketing teaching conducted by such models seems problematic (Hackley, 1998), at least in respect of high level expertise. The point at issue here is not whether strategic marketing can, as a human experience, be verbally modelled, but what form of models might be appropriate in a training and education situation. How can expertise, i.e. being very good indeed at an aspect of marketing at the strategic level, be fostered, promoted, learned, in respect of the tacit elements present in practical action but difficult to represent in abstract modelling situations?

The notion of the "tacit" in practical knowledge is used here in the context of the psychology of expertise. Psychological expertise research takes a cognitive perspective on the way actors subsume the details of particular phenomena within abstracted concepts which are then applied, as forms of cognitive schemata, to problems of action (for general examples from cognitivist psychological research into memory and knowledge representation see Rumelhart and Norman (1983), Kotovsky *et al.* (1985), Schank (1981). For example, in chess and physics, experts and novices differ in respect of the concepts they utilise in modelling problems: the experts' concepts are packed with contingent possibilities, while the novices' are rather threadbare, focusing on concrete operations. The research area of managerial cognition seeks to

elicit the components of managerial decision making by cognitively "mapping" them (e.g. Huff, 1990; Schank and Abelson, 1977; Eden, 1992; Swan, 1997 for overview). The codification of such action schemata into theoretical knowledge remains problematic, particularly with respect to the specificity of action schemata to domains of managerial and marketing activity. In marketing, a person who is capable of highly successful accomplishment (expertise) in strategic decisions concerning, say, new product development, the planning and implementation of marketing communications campaigns, commissioning and interpreting marketing research, recruiting marketing staff and so on, is likely to utilise highly sophisticated, abstract, experientially mediated concepts in the formulation of and heuristic search with respect to, marketing problems. Representations of expertise tend to have a high order of domain specificity (Mandler, 1962) so there is a case for dealing separately with each marketing and management domain. However, this paper is seeking to set out some parameters for further development of these issues in academic marketing, so for current purposes "strategic" level marketing management is regarded as a generic category which may well be subject to further refinement and differentiation through subsequent research. The issue in question here concerns the epistemological basis of theories of expertise in strategic level marketing. The next section attempts to address this by looking at the material we have available for getting at expertise in marketing: that is, expert talk.

The epistemological status of expert talk in marketing

Can we derive theory from the things expert marketers say about what they do? There is a philosophical issue at stake here concerning the (problematic) distinction between action, and linguistic signifiers of action. To take an essentially structuralist perspective, we can say that, where a person is asked to introspect about their mental processes in practising their professional activity, their answer must reflect the linguistic presuppositions of the discipline in which they operate (Hirst, 1987). If a marketer is asked by an academic how she does marketing, an intelligible response must necessarily draw upon publicly available meanings. In other words, the publicly codified (in verbal symbols) knowledge of a discipline provides the conceptual vocabulary for discourse among practitioners, academics and the wider public. This public knowledge does not constitute a cognitive psychology of expertise in the domain in that it seems to stands apart from the private, possibly pre-linguistic constituents of practical action. On this view, the ontological status of practical knowledge resides in the conceptual vocabulary of a discipline's discourse. Wittgenstein (1968) alluded to this position in marking a distinction between signifiers (in this case, words) and the thing signified (problem-solving cognition with respect to marketing action).

The early Wittgenstein took an extreme position on the question of whether a "private" language, i.e. one that is not socially constituted, is possible at all (Wittgenstein, 1968). Notwithstanding this argument, we can see there are difficulties in asking experts to articulate the mental processes underlying their

expertise. Are these processes accessible to the experts? If so, are their articulations accessible to us? Ask marketing managers with marketing qualifications how they solve problems and they will very likely offer an explanation which utilises the concepts with which they conduct their professional discourse. In fact, the implication of the positions taken by Popper (1972) and Wittgenstein (1968) on public discourse is that they can do no other.

To reiterate then, codified marketing knowledge, like any other form of practical knowledge, has a relation to professional practice which is not necessarily reflective of the cognitive style of experts within its domain. That is, high level expertise in strategic marketing is not what the books say. As mentioned above, marketing is not alone in this. A doctor cannot learn to be an expert from books alone and neither can a plumber, a footballer or a hairdresser. Michael Polanyi (1962) wrote that "we can know more than we can tell" and a similar theme runs through much philosophy of knowledge, including the work of, for example, Wittgenstein (1968) and Kuhn (1962). For Kuhn (1962), the usually implicit paradigmatic assumptions underpinning practice in normal science set the terms of reference for practitioners. But, crucially, Kuhnian science makes radical progress when a set of paradigmatic assumptions ceases to be implicit. Made explicit, they are judged inadequate and are superseded by a new paradigm. Seen in this way, it may be argued that the pre-eminence of the articulated aspect of knowledge has been fundamental to the extraordinary progress of Western science (Molander, 1992). Knowledge that remains tacit, uncodified and embedded in a cultural frame of meaning, to use a Giddensian term (Giddens, 1993), cannot form the basis of science. Scientific progress might be said to consist in deconstructing tacit knowledge from one frame of meaning and reconstructing it explicitly in another. For the present argument, we are concerned with the marketing practitioner frame of meaning and the deconstruction of the tacit knowledge underlying expertise in marketing management at the strategic level, and the reconstruction of this knowledge in an explicit codified form consistent with the frame of meaning of the wider academic community.

The problem of the elicitation of knowledge from experts has been one with which cognitive scientists have wrestled in the drive to design computerised expert systems which can perform tasks of complex human problem solving (e.g. Anderson, 1980). This work has resulted in several conceptualisations of practical knowledge which may help to shed light on the distinction between theoretical knowledge and practical expertise in strategic marketing management. The work on expert systems described below does not merely offer practitioner orientated marketing academics a clear illustration of the notion of the tacit dimension of knowledge. It may also offer the most telling insights into the fundamental problems of theorising about practical action, problems which marketing does not adequately address. In view of its importance to the central themes of this paper, this section deals with expert

systems from first principles and attempts to carefully draw out the connections with the psychology of expertise, and the possible components of expertise in strategic marketing management.

Expert systems and practical knowledge for strategic marketing management

An "expert system" is a computer programme which is designed to reproduce the problem solving behaviour of a human expert in a particular domain of application (Baldwin, 1987). An essential feature of expert systems is that they draw inferences from a knowledge base on the basis of "if x, then y" logical procedures. Work in the design of computerised expert systems for artificial intelligence constitutes, so it has been argued, an epistemological revolution (Janik, 1988) which will change the philosophical assumptions underpinning notions of knowledge in practical activities. Designing an expert system entails eliciting knowledge from human experts and converting it into a binary form for computer programming. The design of such systems requires every step in problem solving reasoning to be made explicit and this process has been salutary in problematising the relationship between experience, language and communication. Nevertheless, the expert knowledge thus obtained can enable machines to conduct or assist low level human decision-making operations. Expert systems have been built in domains such as medical diagnosis, engineering fault finding, vision and speech recognition, robotics, manufacturing and banking (Baldwin, 1987), in chess, in weather forecasting and also in marketing management (Moutinho and Brownlie, 1995; Proctor and Ruocco, 1992; Proctor, 1991; Wierenga, 1990). Talvinen (1995) has extensively reviewed the considerable amount of recent work in expert systems for marketing management decision support. This large volume of work is indicative of the considerable interest in, and potential for, marketing applications of expert systems. Notwithstanding this work, the success and scope of expert systems in the kind of complex creative problem solving demanded in strategic marketing remains to be established. Expert systems are not yet able to learn to solve complex problems which demand creativity. In particular, the metaphoric character of language cannot, it seems, be fully captured in a computer programme. Among the highly problematic features of the use of expert systems in qualitative decision making in professional domains there is a perceived danger that the kind of (binary) codification of knowledge which expert systems demand may leave out those very tacit elements of discretion which are indispensable in successful human problem solving (Neilson, 1987; Ostberg, 1988).

Constructions of expert knowledge in strategic marketing
Designing an effective expert system, then, requires that the designers are able to explicitly state every respect in which knowledge informs a decision-making process, and this requirement for explicitness has emphasised the importance

of tacit or unarticulated knowledge in practical skill. What forms might this aspect of knowledge take in marketing expertise?

Strategic marketing management constitutes a domain of practical activity within which expertise resides in practitioners having an extensive domain relevant knowledge base and a sophisticated set of rules for learning and problem solving within the domain (Hackley, 1996). Marketing problems at this level tend to be "ill-structured" (Mintzberg *et al.,* 1976) and as such require structuring by the problem solver (Hackley and Kitchen, 1997, Rickards, 1996). This problem construction entails an order of creativity. To take a simple example, the commissioning of appropriate market research is an important skill in marketing management at the strategic level (Thomas, 1984). The knowledge base involved in this skill would probably consist of a stock of marketing research data gathering methods and techniques of inferential statistics. To this extent the knowledge is no more than could be learned from good texts by marketing undergraduates. However, the sophisticated set of rules involved in practical expertise can only be developed through domain relevant problem solving experience. This point alludes to the problem of transfer of learning from a modelling environment to a professional practice environment (Mandler, 1962). It is often difficult to ascertain which modelling (training, education) activities will furnish a person with the rules of practical expertise. These rules enable, for example, a skilled marketer to make problem sensitive judgements about formulating their research problem, specifying the most appropriate research method within the context of the product/market conditions and the constraints of the budget, assessing the limitations of the research and evaluating the results in such a way as to generate useful insights into the marketing problem the research is designed to help solve. These insights result in the expert marketer forming and refining a heuristic or rule of thumb for solving their problem. The power of this heuristic in solving the problem depends on the high level skill of the marketer. This high level skill or expertise in marketing problem solving may be described as "creative" and is founded on extensive knowledge and experience.

Expert systems require knowledge to be programmed into the computer in a timeless propositional form. Practical human expertise on the other hand is temporally mediated. The expert evolves, learning from all experience, relating new theoretical or empirical knowledge to existing knowledge structures in memory and subsuming knowledge within a larger and increasingly complex conceptual organisation (Novak, 1977). On this view, knowledge in memory is not static: it undergoes, in an active learner, a perpetual re-evaluation in the light of new knowledge. So, on this line of reasoning, strategic marketing management theories of expertise should entail conceptual frameworks which offer the possibility of subsuming large areas of practical specificity in a logically coherent relation to the theoretical knowledge, in order to assist in practical marketing problem solving. How then, might practical experience in a strategic area of marketing develop into a level of problem solving

accomplishment which constitutes expertise, and what might the implications be for talking about (theorising about) marketing expertise in the academic context?

Marketing theory and the acquisition of expertise in marketing management

Expertise in a practical discipline can be thought of as the pinnacle of a scale of accomplishment which begins with the category "novice" and runs through intermediate stages of expertise acquisition (Dreyfuss and Dreyfuss, 1986). In this paper we are concerned with the highest level of accomplishment in this hierarchy. Cognitive scientists such as Anderson (1980, 1983) have conceptualised expertise acquisition as a cognitive process of proceduralising declarative knowledge. Declarative, sometimes known as propositional knowledge, consists in the factual knowledge of the domain and may be expressed as a series of declarative statements. Procedural or practical knowledge consists in detailed experientially moderated problem-solving procedures. Expertise is acquired as practitioners proceduralise and refine their declarative factual knowledge through direct interaction with domain relevant problems. This division of knowledge follows Ryle's (1959) philosophical division of knowledge into the "knowing that" and the "knowing how". Experts in a domain must have knowledge of the facts of their domain and must also know how to utilise this knowledge to solve domain related problems. Such problems in the domain of marketing management might include the following, derived from Hackley (1996), following Thomas (1984):

- How to ... gather and select relevant information from the business environment to make predictions about market opportunities.

- How to ... be innovative at a strategic level seeking new product opportunities which can form part of a strategic vision for the organisation.

- How to ... communicate the benefits of marketing within the organisation.

- How to ... optimise the marketing mix to achieve stated objects.

Professional expertise in solving these problems successfully and repeatedly requires a substantial knowledge base of facts and procedures. Facts about the empirical world (theoretically explicit, or theoretically tacit) may elucidate or furnish the heuristic search, but in and of themselves cannot solve problems and therefore cannot offer a model for a rational problem solving (Popper, 1968, 1972) science.

To some academics theoretical weakness in academic managerial marketing need not matter (Charnes *et al.,* 1985), principally because it is a practical activity. To others, a theory in a practical discipline such as marketing must cohere in some respect with practice in order to satisfy an important (Popperian) criterion of rationality. For O'Shaugnessy (1992), marketing

managers' action can be seen as resting upon rules and assumptions which may be tacit (although he uses the word implicit). The public articulation of these rules is the task of theory development in marketing. Given O'Shaugnessy's (1992) view of the importance of theory development in marketing, how might we conceptualise expert marketing action in terms of such rules?

Forms of tacit knowledge in marketing expertise
Anderson (1980, 1983) conceptualised the acquisition of practical expertise as a two stage process of utilising (proceduralising) declarative knowledge in solving domain related problems. Through practice, novices advance along a scale of expertise as their conceptual knowledge of the domain is expanded and refined (Bhaskar and Simon, 1977; Chi *et al.,* 1981). This experientially mediated process entails the acquisition of subtle forms of knowledge representation which are critical in exercising expertise but which are difficult to articulate in words, i.e. they are "tacit".

As a thought experiment, we might reflect on what a model of tacit knowledge in managerial marketing expertise might look like. Such a conceptual model might indicate possible clues concerning the extent to which marketing expertise may consist in a different order of knowledge from the public, codified form extant in consultancy and academia. The knowledge categories used in Table I are based on the categories deriving from cognitive science and simplified as "explicit propositional" or "tacit procedural" knowledge. In this context, for simplicity, the notion of propositional knowledge is used interchangeably with the notion of declarative knowledge. The marketing skills are derived from Hackley (1996), following Thomas (1984). Notwithstanding the anecdotal nature of the tacit knowledge components of this speculative model, it is presented to help elucidate, on an intuitive level, the general theme of this paper.

Clearly Table I demonstrates not only possible components of the tacit dimension of marketing expertise but the difficulty of trying to talk about these. The components of "skill" here are intended to illustrate degrees of specificity in talking about action. For example, expertise in brand management entails sensitivity to market changes. Models of portfolio and product life cycle analysis may provide conceptual frameworks which mediate between theory and action and this case. But the inference engine of the expert would apply different rules to the interpretation of such models than that of the novice. Indeed, it is well known that many successful marketing entrepreneurs make no use at all of formal frameworks such as these.

However, this does not mean that knowledge does not intervene in the cognition of marketing expertise. Expertise is not a mere "knack" or fortunate cognitive style. It is a rigorous psychological finding that expertise is constituted through a highly complex cognitive interaction of qualitatively different forms of knowledge representation (Bhaskar and Simon, 1977, Chi *et al.,* 1981). The model above may suggest forms of knowledge which are present

Marketing skill	Propositional/declarative knowledge	(Tacit) procedural knowledge
Commissioning research	Research methodology, statistical techniques	Problem sensitive knowledge of when to use a particular research method to yield a suitable problem-solving heuristic; ability to negotiate on internal budget and external research costs: the political skill to "sell" research findings to colleagues to justify desired strategy
Environmental analysis	Analytical tools (SWOT etc.) data sources	Intuitive ability to draw predictive inferences from static models to form dynamic real-world hypotheses: ability to generate ideas at a strategic level which create meanings for consumers and which are within the production capability of the firm
Product/brand management	Quantitative techniques, accounting/finance techniques, production techniques, knowledge of legal constraints on advertising claims, models of portfolio analysis and life cycle analysis	Intuitive sensitivity to market changes, creative qualities in acting in an independent inner-directed way to establish product line adaptations/changes and novel marketing communications themes; political sensitivity to the personalities within the organisation; sensitivity to the organisation's strategic vision
Communicating the benefits of marketing within the organisation	Textbook accounts of the marketing concept, of marketing as the "whole business seen from the point of view of the consumer" of salutary "marketing myopia" type case histories	Skills of augmentation, persuasiveness, charm, verbal analytical intelligence to go beyond textbook platitudes in discussing marketing issues

Table I.
A conceptualisation of explicit propositional knowledge and tacit procedural knowledge in marketing management

in the practice of marketing expertise, but which are not adequately addressed in extant marketing theory, notwithstanding the use of business simulations which encounter problems of context in transferability of learning (Cormier and Hagman, 1987; Mandler, 1962). What, then might all this mean for research and theory development in strategic marketing management expertise?

Concluding comments
This paper has sought to open up an interdisciplinary perspective on a question which is under-addressed in marketing theory. In this undertaking the paper has attempted to talk about the tacit. The problematisation of the tacit dimension of practical expertise has profound potential implications for marketing epistemology, as it does for all other practical disciplines. One view, implied in this paper through references to Popper's (1968, 1972) problem

solving criterion for scientific rationality, is that addressing the tacit dimension of practical expertise is central to issues of epistemological rationality in practical disciplines. Marketing theory's relation to practical expertise in marketing seems critical in this respect. Furthermore, the preceding discussion has implied that a natural science narrative of theory development does not address the foregoing problem (Quine, 1969; Medawar, 1964; Lakatos, 1971) because it fails to capture the tacit particulars, and the "poetic" character of imaginative human expertise (Vico in Leach, 1976). The transition from the positive premise to the normative prescription is a classical epistemological dilemma which strategic marketing management, along with other practical fields of codified theory, has not satisfactorily addressed. To return to the question posed in the opening paragraph of the paper; what is it to be very good indeed (an expert) at marketing management at strategic levels of decision making, and how might theory in marketing model this expertise in such a way as to promote its acquisition?

This question is broad and can be seen as in terms of a generalised call for more sophisticated pluralistic practical theorising in marketing. Central to this issue of pluralism in marketing theory is the question of the compatibility of epistemologies which emphasise critical understanding and interpretation, ontological realism or linguistic relativism. The implication here is that good marketing theory must begin with epistemological considerations in order to advance the intellectual connections between marketing theory and practical expertise. Epistemological issues in turn require grounding in an ontological framework which states assumptions concerning the nature or essence of the social phenomenon under investigation (Kavanagh, 1994). Marketing management education does indeed focus on a domain of practice in the world. But an explicit acknowledgment of the tacit dimension in which practical marketing management expertise is grounded can open up new and fertile directions for marketing education, theory and research. Normative prescriptions in managerial marketing diminish their subject matter and close off enquiry. Astute marketing actors seek a naturalistic, experientially mediated understanding of their social worlds. The role of theory in marketing management education can be to make more of this kind of understanding explicit.

This paper has placed particular emphasis on the problematic use of language in conceptualising expertise in strategic marketing. The emphasis taken in the paper places the philosophical status of language and its relation to social action in a prominent position in the marketing expertise research agenda. Put another way, in talking and theorising about doing marketing very well (expertly) at the strategic level, what should words and language be?

For example, what are the implications of the illocutionary force of words for the elicitation and codification of marketing expertise? It is well established in social research that words can be implicated in the construction of meaning both by what they say in respect of the concepts to which they refer, and in what they do (i.e. their illocutionary force) in terms of the social

accomplishments they achieve (see, for example, Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Goffman, 1981; Mills, 1940; Harre and Stearns, 1995; and an overview concerning talk at and about work in Case, 1995). What might this mean for the elicitation and codification of marketing expertise? Should we look beyond the scope of expert systems design towards a less socially solipsistic view of how a marketing expert uses words to accomplish and to demonstrate her (or his) expertise? Can research into managerial cognition (Swan, 1977) offer direction to this question?

Second, to what extent can researchers in, say, marketing expert systems take word-signs as indices of inner cognitive structures? Or does this misrepresent the way that expert systems work? A semiotic (or semiological) perspective locates the communicative properties of language within a field of codes which are open to interpretation (e.g. Danesi, 1993; Sebeok, 1991). As Sebeok (1991) points out with regard to the rich overlap between marketing and semiotics (see, for example Bachand, 1992; Umiker-Sebeok *et al.*, 1987; Hackley, 1999),

> . . .in the marketing of goods, services and ideas, auxiliary verbal and non-verbal messages are normally implied (Sebeok, 1991, p. 147).

This comment refers to the tacit (non-verbal) dimension of marketing messages aimed at consumers. It thus problematises the message-meaning identity implicit in cognitivist frameworks of marketing communications. More generally, the naive view that language can represent a world of concepts which in turn represent the structure of the world cannot sustain an epistemology of marketing expertise.

Getting at marketing expertise, then, in order to develop theoretical models of it which can assist in the acquisition of that expertise, is a delicate multi-disciplinary undertaking which entails a subtly shifting pedagogic position away from a model of prescription and towards a model of philosophically informed enquiry. The conceptualisation and codification of practical marketing expertise is only one half of the academic task: communicating this knowledge to non-experts (including other kinds of expert) is the other half. The problematisation of the role of theorising with language in this double hermeneutic task can point towards the development of new, more epistemologically sophisticated marketing theory which embraces larger areas of the tacit in practical strategic marketing expertise.

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