

Michael Dent¹, Edward Wong Sek Khin²

THE MARKETEEER EXPERIENCES:
AN ACTION RESEARCH CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENTS

This paper identifies action research conceptual developments in the study of the marketeer experience involving a turn from differentiation to dedifferentiation of everyday life and marketeer experiences. The epistemological background of action research is described and an initial description of the possible research approach is given. Thus, it is suggested that contemporary conceptualizations of this action research subject correspond to the so-called "reflective professional action research" theorizing in social sciences.

Keywords: reflective action research; living thesis; tacit knowledge; marketeer.

Майкл Дент, Едвард Вонг Сек Хін

ДОСВІД ПРОДАВЦЯ:
РОЗРОБКА ПОНЯТТЯ ДІЄВОГО ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ

У статті запропоновано поняття дієвого дослідження у вивченні досвіду продавця, включаючи перехід від диференціювання до дедиференціювання повсякденного життя та досвіду продавця. Описано епістемологічну основу дієвого дослідження і надано базовий опис можливого дослідницького підходу. Обґрунтовано необхідність співвідносити сучасні концепції дієвого дослідження і так зване "рефлексивне професійне дієве дослідження" у суспільних науках.

Ключові слова: рефлексивне дієве дослідження; жива теза; неявне знання; продавець.

Рис. 1. Літ. 35.

Майкл Дент, Эдвард Вонг Сек Кин

ОПЫТ ПРОДАВЦА:
РАЗРАБОТКА ПОНЯТИЯ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ ДЕЙСТВИЕМ

В статье предложено понятие исследования действием в изучении опыта продавца, включая переход от дифференцирования к дедифференцированию повседневной жизни и опыта продавца. Описана эпистемологическая основа исследования действием и подано базовое описание возмозможного исследовательского подхода. Обоснована необходимость соотносить современные концепции исследования действием и так называемое "рефлексивное профессиональное исследования действием" в общественных науках.

Ключевые слова: рефлексивное исследования действием; живой тезис; неявное знание; продавец.

Introduction. The purpose of this paper is a research-based examination of using an action research approach with reflective professional practice in the evaluation of marketeer experience involving a turn from differentiation to dedifferentiation of everyday life and professional marketeer experiences in Europe, United States and Asia.

The various sections of this paper follow the traditional layout of a literature review, in this case of reflective practice where the philosophy of this methodology

¹ PhD Candidate, Institute of Postgraduate Studies, University of Malaya, Malaysia.

² Corresponding author, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Business and Accountancy, University of Malaya, Malaysia.

and other sources are described. Secondly, a discussion of this research methodology, and thirdly, a discussion consisting of the author bibliography case study using the living thesis paradigm in his explications of tacit knowledge.

Literature review. Schon (1984) and Moon (2000) both describe a reflective practitioner as the one who is simply thoughtful about his or her own practices, though this is not the whole of the discussion. Reflective practice requires mental processes of reflection. Schon and Moon also speak of a reflective practitioner, a person with a self-image as a facilitator, recognising the uncertainty within a profession, one who has the knowledge base of a member of his/her profession, and is aware of the problems that need to be resolved in any professional practice. To succeed a reflective practitioner deals with this uncertainty by putting client relationships at the centre of his/her professional practices with attempts to develop negotiated shared meanings and understandings as a joint process, all of which require reflection.

Similarly, Proctor (1993) states that reflective practice is the process of critically and rationally treating professional history, evaluating the events, and then using the results of this process with the sum of their professional knowledge, including technical and ethical aspects, to tackle new situations. These critical elements have been widely associated with reflective practices and often taken to be the main purpose of reflection (Smyth, 1989).

In similar vein to Smyth's ideology, but dealing with education, Wong (2004) stated that in reflective professional education, the activities of teaching often need to be set in their historical, political, theoretical, and moral contexts, if not, then this turns reflective teaching into an imperfect technical process. In contrast, reflection is the "active and militant" tool that enables contextualisation (Smyth, 1989), and as a consequence, this "technical-rational" education fails to provide the elements necessary to enable doctoral candidates to develop the heuristics, or the necessary skills of problem-solving by trial and error, needed to deal with the real world chaos that surrounds all the research.

Patton (2002) states that the use of human experiences as sources and resources is the foundation of heuristic enquiry, and this hit-and-miss form of enquiry begins the processes of understanding the topic, finding its essences and meanings. However, this process requires an intensity of investigation to establish a quality based result founded upon personal experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This personalized approach establishes the necessary factor of rigour, but not that of duplication, because through insights, reflections, and mutual experiential explanations as research components are unique for a time and place.

The developments in what Jack Whitehead terms the "living thesis paradigm" (1993) Whitehead argues that researcher and coresearcher dialogues are the new ways in which action researchers represent the living aspect of practice. This approach celebrates a living form of practitioner educational theory, which is open-ended and contains an intention to create something better (Wong, 2003). Whitehead (1998) asserts that including "I" and embracing subjectivity is essential to research within this paradigm. In addition, Whitehead (2002) exhorts individuals not to be silent, or hold back their perspectives or try to struggle dishonestly in order to fit their private world with a public one. Individuals must be aware of their subjective selves by not engaging in the processes of denial or by conforming to oppressive domination concerning gender, race, or differently cultured selves.

The living thesis paradigm compels the researcher to document any conflicts he or she experiences, with their internal self, and externally as they present themselves to the world, and especially their feelings when both their internal and external selves are in harmony. This is living theory, as described in Whitehead (1993, 1996) as a set of comments arguing that one's espoused theory ideally should be consistent with a person's living theory. Whitehead further states that living theory's explanations are not embodied in the individual's life forces, but an individual contains an intention to create something in the future based on that person's goals or values and all controlled within a variable action plan. Hence, this theory is an explanation, which makes sense of the present in terms of an evaluation of the past with an intention to change some aspect of one's own practice, or the world in the future (Wong, 2003). Oddly, the use of the first person "I" in some research writing is not recommended, while in action research it is almost a trademark of the paradigm.

Research objective. The purpose of this paper is a research-based examination of using an action research approach with reflective professional practice in evaluation of explication of tacit knowledge. The aim of this research is to develop a model of explicating tacit knowledge by employing ethnographic research methodology. This is the foundation of the emphasis on the researcher's responses, thoughts, and experiences and they are vital for a researcher and a research. With this foundation, a researcher gleans warranted assertions from his or her own life experiences as well as from life experiences of his coresearchers.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- Can you describe one event or activity in which Michael Dent was involved which worked particularly well and one event/activity that worked out particularly badly in your view.

- What (in both cases) could have been done to improve the outcome?

It is generally accepted in qualitative research that highly structured and standardised questions are not desirable, whereas hypothetical questions in which a respondent is asked to speculate can be far more efficacious. It is possible (following an emergent research design and non-anonymity of respondents) that an author could have followed up with some kind of Devil's Advocate (a.k.a Socratic) questioning. However, this then leads an author into ethical and methodological swamps which an author hesitates to enter.

Methodology. This research is essentially qualitative, that is to say it is an emic (or insiders) perspective in which a researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy (Merriam, 2001). Since qualitative research focuses on process, meaning and understanding a product, such a study is richly descriptive. Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to communicate the key learning points.

Qualitative research is also fundamentally interpretive. Utilising Yin's (2003) typology of case studies (there are 6 types in a two by three matrix) this is clearly a single case study rather than multiple case (the other 3 boxes are exploratory, descriptive or causal). In this respect it seeks to understand how behaviour and/or processes are influenced by and themselves influence context. Boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. This is not, however, narrative research (Creswell 2003) as it clearly has an applied focus (how do I improve my practice?).

However, it does possess significant elements of grounded theory whereby there is a procedure to generate theories that explains at a broad conceptual level a series of actions in the life of Michael Dent (which occurs over a period of time). Therefore as a case study it can be regarded as either causal (after Yin) or evaluative (according to Leedy).

Discussions.

Conceptualizations of the Marketeer Experience. Developments discussed here exemplify the incorporation of a case study with one single case (the author's self) being the focus of the research. Specifically, practices of deconstruction are illustrated in the first two developments, which focus on the core values, personality traits, value position and inner & outer directed values. Hence, there are, however, several different events over a number of years used to paint this picture. In addition, there are many observations from a number of different people with whom the author interacted over the years. This is not a descriptive nor an explanatory case study (to use the typology of Leedy, 1997) but an evaluative case study as it is used to evaluate the efficacy of the course of action taken at any time and investigated (through peer review and reflection) as to how the outcome could have been improved.

Core Values. The core values of an individual are partly shaped by experience and partly based on personality profile. They are those core beliefs that an individual holds central to their very existence. Over the course of this research the author examined how these brand values evolved and indeed how they have changed significantly over the period of his corporate career. The core proposition is what is crafted in order to present the product to market. Fundamental dissonances between Core Values and core proposition create many difficulties and are impossible to maintain successfully in the long term.

Personality Traits. Personality traits are those characteristics (good and bad) that typify a brand. They can consciously be worked on to try and change but this can be extremely difficult if a change is dissonant to preferred behaviour. And it is only through behaviour that they can be changed – relying on the perceptions of others.

Positive attributes can be built on or reinforced or new ones sought. Negative attributes are best minimised (or ideally lost) and this can always be achieved by a large-scale change in social/work circle. Changing continent for a new work allows opportunities to do just that. Family circles are far more fixed – although they too change over time, for example, one brother in law may be swapped for another.

Brand attributes that perhaps have been forced on the author would be bounceability (Always look on the bright side of life) and Perseverance ("Monsieur Dent – vous etes Forte !" {Alliance Francaise, Belgium}). Negative ones would be arrogance and selfishness. Negative attributes are nearly always the most difficult to shift – and in the course of life and career probably the most important ones to work on. Job promotions are often based not so much on strengths as on the absence of weaknesses.

Value Position. The value position describes how a product or a service (in this case, the author) delivers value to a customer (in this case, the author's employer). It also depends on competitive positioning as well as value perceptions not merely deliverables divided by cost (salary etc.). It is perhaps not surprising that the lesson learnt here is that perceived value of deliverables is mightily more important than reality. Time spent working hard and effectively is essentially wasted if no one knows about it.

By (sometimes painful) comparison with others the author has seen that this can be as true for men as it is (a fortiori) for women.

Inner & Outer Directed Values. Inner & outer directed values relate more to emotional needs of a customer (or in this study, the author's employer and/or Students). Market research recognises the difference between functional and emotional needs. With many industrial goods, consumer durables and some fast moving consumer goods are the functional needs that dominate. In the service sector, however, this is less clear cut and when it comes to individual brand maps the author suspects that emotional needs heavily outweigh functional ones. Employers are always nervous of new appointments as a poor choice will reflect badly their own management skills. Hence a perception that the new appointment is a relatively risk free safe pair of hands will frequently outweigh the apparent attraction of a more risk loving alternative.

Application

The brand map relies upon the standard segmentation, targeting and positioning theories to work effectively. Indeed as McDonald & Dunbar (1998) would argue there is no possibility of any success unless the market is first meaningfully segmented. This is particularly dynamic when examining different work groups in different cultures over time. Basically everything is changing.

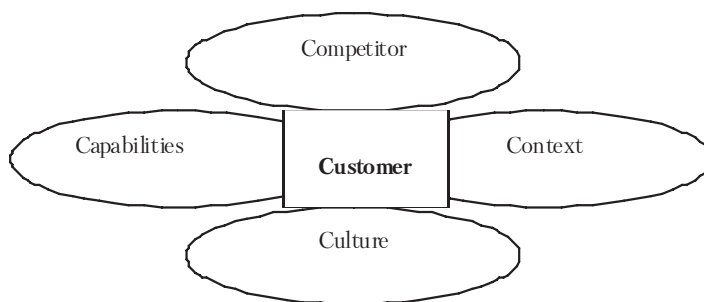


Fig. 1. DHL's scheme

The author uses the DHL 5C analysis (customers, competitors, capabilities, context & culture) to illustrate exactly how dynamic these changes are.

One's own capabilities will change as new skills are learned and others forgotten. The cultures one encounters are different both in organisational terms and socio-culturally. Clearly the work based competitors (i.e., other colleagues vying for the same promotion) will also differ as will the target audience (or customers in our case) and as they also have many different ethnic backgrounds and skill sets this makes positioning particularly complex. Indeed, the mere attribute of being a "Brit" is a strong positive in some situations (e.g., Latin America where the author found being a Brit was very much appreciated – mainly because not being a "Gringo", the US American). In other cultures (like Malaysia) the negative perceptions of British arrogance can re-emphasise a pre-existing weakness. To use the typology of Pappu et al. (2007) the author is seen as a product (in the marketing sense of the word) of the UK as well as being from Britain). Pappu et al. explain how perceptions can be favourable

or unfavourable. In the international arena this will clearly be different in different markets as they rightly identify. Amonini et al. (1998) found that the microimage outweighed the importance of the macroimage, however, different markets are more likely to have different perspectives on the macro (or general) country image.

The author takes context in this analysis to refer to time. It needs no great imagination to think of many changes that have occurred in the manner of business communications, work practices, technology etc. There are many aspects of capabilities that can be discussed under the banner of improving one's practice. But the fundamental difference in this analysis is that of culture. As the diagram illustrates, all of the circles in the 5C analysis overlap. Culture impacts all the other 4Cs. Moving from one organisational culture to another requires a certain skill set. Moving from one organisational and ethnic culture to another requires a step change.

The culture that the author encountered at DHL was one of "Work Hard – Play Hard", very internationally orientated but with a definite bias towards UK senior management (until the Deutsche Post take over). As Trompenaars said, people do not leave their own culture at the front door when they enter the office building. So although there was a clearly identifiable company culture, the culture of the local country also impacted heavily. Although this is perhaps less the case in larger regional offices than in a country office as the mix of nationalities is greater in the former. Hence all of Hofstede's (2005) 5 dimensions used to describe the differences in national culture come to bear and it is perhaps in this arena where the author's experiences provide greater illumination.

Conclusions. The approach described is that of a single case study based on a research philosophy of critical theory (with an objective ontology and subjective epistemology). Data was gathered primarily by way of social media (i.e. the Internet) using a homogeneous snowball sampling method. This elicited peer reviews of various episodes in the work place in which the author participated. The initial research design was piloted and tested in order to; firstly get the bugs out of the system and, secondly, improve the quality of the research instrument and thereby improve the richness of the data received. Triangulation, by way of utilising a combination of data sources (e-mails, diaries, Powerpoint presentations, toolkits etc) helped add rigour and breadth and depth although not necessarily validation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Triangulation is more likely to support any finding or conclusion if it is based on several different sources; this is achieved by looking for corroboration in the responses of different work actors (colleagues etc) on the same episode.

This research endeavours to define a framework and methodology which offers other international marketeers the opportunity to capture their own learning experiences and hence also improve their professional practice.

References

- Amonini, C., Keogh, J & Sweeney, J.C. (1998). The dual nature of country of origin effects: a study of Australian consumers' evaluations. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 6 (2) pp 13-27.
- Brown, T. & Jones, L. (2001). *Action Research & Postmodernism*, Open University Press, Philadelphia.
- Creswell, J.W. (2008). *Educational Research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.), Pearson Education, New Jersey, USA.
- Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.). (1994). *Handbook of qualitative research*. California: Sage Publication.

- Denzin & Lincoln* (2005). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd Ed, Sage Publications Inc. USA.
- Lewin, K.* (1946). Action research and minority problems. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol.2, No. 4, pp. 34-46.
- Perry & Gummesson* (2004). Action research in Marketing, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 38, No.3/4.
- Hofstede, G. & Hofstede, G.J.* (2005). *Cultures & Organizations: Software of the Mind*, 2nd Edition, London, McGraw Hill.
- Janesick, V. J.* (1998). "Stretching" Exercises for Qualitative Researchers. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Johnson & Duberley* (2000). *Understanding Management Research*, Sage Publications, London.
- Kuhn, T.* (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago, Chicago University Books.
- Leedy, P.D.* (1997). *Practical Research: Planning and Design*. 6th ed. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Maxwell, J.A.* (2005). *Qualitative Research Design: An interactive approach*, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.
- McDonald, M. & Dunbar, I.* (1998). *Market Segmentation*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, UK.
- McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J.* (2002). *Action Research, Principles & Practice*, RoutledgeFalmer, London.
- Merriam, S.B.* (2001). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Moon, J.* (2000). *Reflection in Learning and Professional Development*. London: Kogan Page Press.
- Naoum, S.G.* (1998). *Dissertation research and writing for construction students*, Boston, Mass Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Pappu, R., Quester, P.G., & Cooksey, R. W.* (2007). Country image and consumer-based brand equity: relationships and implications for international marketing. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 38, pp. 726-745.
- Proctor, K.* (1993). Tutors professional knowledge of supervision and the implications for supervision practice. In: J. Calderhead and P. Gates.(Eds). *Conceptualising Reflection in Teacher Development*. London: Falmer Press.
- Reason, P. & Bradbury, H.* (2006). *The Handbook of Action Research*, Sage Publications, London.
- Scholz, R. W. & Tietje, O.* (2002). *Embedded Case Study Methods: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Knowledge*. London: Sage Publications Inc.
- Schon, D.* (1983). *The Reflexive Practitioner: How Professionals think in Action*, New York, Basic Books.
- Schon, D.A.* (1987). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass Press.
- Smyth, J.* (1989). Developing and sustaining critical reflection in teacher education, *Journal of Teacher Education*, 40, (2), pp. 2-9.
- Stake, R.* (1995). *The art of case research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, A., & Glaser, B.* (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Van Tuyl, G. J.* (2010). *From Engineer to Co-Creative Catalyst: An Inclusional and transformational journey*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Bath.
- Thompson, F. & Perry, C.* (2004). Generalising results of an action research project in one work place to other situations. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol.38, Number 3/4.
- Trompenaars, F.* (2007). *Riding the Whirlwind: Connecting people and organizations in a culture of innovation*, Oxford; The Infinite Ideas Co. Ltd.
- Whitehead, J.* (2000). How do I improve my practice? *Creating and legitimating an epistemology of practice*, *Reflective Practice* 1(1), pp. 91-104.
- Wong, E.S.* (2003). *Action Research Philosophy: The Fountain of Living Research*. Perth, Centre of Professional Practitioner Resources Publication.
- Wong, E.S.* (2004). *Action Research: The Living Thesis*. Perth: Centre of Professional Practitioner Resources Publication.
- Yin, R.K.* (2003). *Case study research, design and methods*, 3rd ed. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 07.09.2011.