

Searching for Balanced Centricity Learnings from a small business context

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Background and Purpose

Gummesson (2008) raises the question whether balanced centricity, i.e. a multi-stakeholder perspective, as contrasted to either supplier-centricity or customer-centricity, is “a realistic objective or yet another professional whim?” Earlier studies on marketing in small businesses, see for instance (Wägar et al 2007), show that the marketing applied in small firms comes close to the notion of a service-based business logic that integrates a supplier- as well as a customer-centric perspective. The purpose of this paper is hence to discover practices of balanced centricity by exploring the mental maps that guide the way small firms approach strategic business activities such as value creation, learning and market relationship management.

Methodology/approach

The research methodology in this paper is based on the theory-in-use approach as developed by Zaltman, Heffring and LeMasters (1982) and Heffring (1985) as a more inferential, interactive and inductive approach than other theory development approaches. The theory-in-use approach rests on case study methodology and grounded theory as applied by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The empirical findings rest on information from twenty case studies, where information has been generated through repeated interactions with each firm included in the study.

Findings

The results from the empirical study confirm Gummesson’s call for a more pragmatic and holistic research agenda (2008). Balanced centricity as a business logic is there to be found when the research perspective is wide and deep enough. The cases clearly show how small firms align their processes with those of their customers, but also how they integrate their own pursuits with the pursuits of close stakeholders in the embedding network. Core foundational elements of a small firm’s business logic relate to how roles in the network are assigned, the network approach to value creation as well as the interactive view of learning within and out of the network.

Originality/value

The value of the paper is twofold. Firstly, it identifies practices of balanced centricity in a specific empirical context, i.e. small firms. Secondly, it presents an alternative research method for successful inductive empirical studies of complex phenomena such as business logics-in-use. The theory-in-use approach is furthermore applied both as a method for collection of information and an approach for generating new knowledge.

Key words: theory-in-use, learning, value creation, networks

Paper type: Research paper