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The Orthodoxy and Hegemony of 'Marketing Communications': From Interactive Communication to Communicative Interaction

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Abstract

The contribution of this paper is to support a widening of the critique of orthodox marketing ideology and practice by reflecting on the growing popularity of integrated marketing communication. This is attempted by asking what is to be integrated and why is marketing not seen as fundamentally an integrative social process. It is recognised that the concept of dialogue as a particular productive form of interaction is largely omitted for the discourse. An explanation for this is developed.

The instrumental, managerialistic nature of marketing thinking and practices are discussed. This suggests that marketing is generally operated as a systematically distorted communication system, even though communication is seen quite generally as just one instrument in a multi-dimensional and manipulable marketing mix.

A rationale for a reconception of communication in management, incorporating marketing, is outlined, and this reveals the need for a ritual metaphor that draws on social constructionist explanations of communication in a social process of marketing.

The limitations and consequences of explaining communication as information transmission are considered, in opposition to the conception of marketing as a knowledge transformation process. The Appreciative System is forwarded as a simple model for the marketing system, as part of a 'corporate communication' managing system.

Implications of this conceptual shift for both the ideology and practice of marketing communication are reflected upon in reaching a conclusion that points the way to a revitalised marketing communication framework.

Introduction: A Reflection on Marketing

Marketing is understood as a knowledge enterprise, increasingly with an emphasis on the management of trading relationships. The thinking and talking of many practitioners and academics is largely unreflective, uncritical, and poorly theorised. Marketing, now almost ubiquitous in its application, remains largely a normative endeavour, with students almost universally concerned with how to 'market'?, rather than why?

In taking a critical reading of marketing (see, for example, Alvesson & Willmott, 1992, 1996; and Brown et al, 1996), there is cause for concern in the discourse, conception of knowledge, model, and way of seeing human relating. Fundamentally, there is a politically-motivated explanation for the common conception of communication for marketing.

Taking a Foucaultian view, the marketing idea can be seen as both a professional ideology and a particular discourse, as well as a set of practices (Morgan, 1992). These are each taken for granted and have become a common sense ('truth') of market-based capitalism (i.e. a consuming society). That there is a power effect of the knowledge created within the marketing system remains unrecognised or ignored by many advocates and practitioners.

“marketing discourse seeks to constitute the subjectivities of consumers and managers” (Morgan, 1992, p. 13).

Marketing management continues to colonise further domains of society as marketing knowledge is deployed for the management of markets.

Almost the entire discipline of marketing (both practice and academy) is premised on a technical-rational view of the nature and purpose of knowledge. This positivistic and normative approach to knowledge drives a functionalist view of society and a scientific pursuit of control through empiricist examination of phenomena defined in micro-economic fashion.

The whole marketing endeavour is thus cast by the prevailing ‘technicists’ as a neutral instrumental technology of exchange. The possibility of a social (political) process is unrecognised or ignored. A managerialistic version of marketing is universally discussed, whilst a wide range of alternative schools of thought (see, for example, Sheth et al, 1988; Lazer & Kelley, 1973a, 1973b) lie undiscovered or discarded (even denounced) by ‘true’ ‘marketeers’. The challenging books remain unread - the questions remain unasked or unanswered.

The unseen menace in this unreflective pursuit lies in the location of managerialistic marketing within the process of constituting a particular kind of society. Specifically, humans are treated as things (to be observed and manipulated), personal identity is reduced to ownership of commodities (brand), social relations are conceived in marketing terms (buyer-seller), and the question of the contribution of marketing effort to the social good is unasked by most.

The technology that we call marketing incorporates a particular way of seeing relationships and of seeing relating: people (agents), objects (products), and events (exchanges in ‘consumption situations’) (see Schmitt (1999) for a showman-like elaboration of this terminology). Marketing has been taken to be “the discipline of exchange behaviour” (Bagozzi, 1975), and the discourse has excluded consideration of how ‘exchanges’ are mediated by asymmetrical power relations. Thus, markets are not understood as social systems, but as “technologies of governance” (Morgan, 1992). This way of thinking favours those who manage the markets by neglecting structures of domination and exploitation. Social relations are then ignored or objectified as variables for managing (we field the 4Ps fetish here!). Giddens (1979) showed that exchange theory does not take account of power. Thus, we are left with a general belief that marketing as a neutral technology for managing exchange - but the behaviour engendered is reciprocal manipulation - far from the supposed ‘good’ of ‘free market forces’.

The “mindscape of marketing communications” (Hartley & Pickton, 1999) is a particular recent, but by no means the only, example is another attempt to elaborate the ‘marketing mix’, this time for the purpose of the ‘integration’ of ‘marketing communications’. This effort is another manifestation of the bias in the orthodoxy of marketing, which can be likened to the captain of the Titanic personally supervising the proverbial re-arrangement of the deckchairs as the ship steams relentlessly into the icy North Atlantic night in pursuit of a speedy and profitable voyage. In another

example, some have seen the problem of customer voice in the advent of, or proposal for, reverse marketing. However, close inspection of this seemingly attractive concept shows that consumer/buyer proactivity merely has a traditional exchange model applied with the buyer/consumer seeking out a preferred supplier. There is no fundamental reflection on the premised communication conception.

This leaves us to ask, among other questions, what mental model prevails in marketing education, scholarship, research, and management practice? In a recent email discussion with David Ballantyne, he commented that “I do see dialogue as a ‘creating value’ term, whereas communication is a ‘circulating value’ term”. Elsewhere he proposes dialogue as “reasoning together” (Ballantyne, 1999) - a special kind of communication, which is itself a special kind of interaction. Communication operated as a participatory social action is constructive of identity, meaning, and knowledge (see Deetz, 1992, 1995, who applies Habermas’ notion of distorted communication), whereas the ‘conduit’ or ‘transmission’ metaphor for communication that is a foundation of managerialistic marketing is of no more than an objective informing technology. Then, there is no free exchange in a value-creating consumption situation. Rather, this possibility is precluded, to result in reciprocal manipulation.

It is time that the marketing discourse and the underlying ideology were more widely challenged on the basis of communication theory. The solution is not the integration of ‘communications’. What problem does this solve? The real issue is in re-conceiving marketing as a social process - inherently capable of communicative interaction. This would require an alternative to the domination of US administrative scholarship that is premised on a convenient (i.e. simple and managerialistic) ‘transmission’ metaphor.

Marketing as Systematically Distorted Communication

Managerialistic assumptions and systematically distorted systems of communication, perhaps out of awareness, perpetuate closed systems of thinking and behaviour when open systems are needed for the survival and prosperity of purposive business enterprise in a dynamic environment.

Much marketing intervention is pursued from the basis of a managerialistic ideology. Deetz (1992, p. 222) defines managerialism as “a kind of logic, a set of routine practices, and an ideology”. He specifies that it is “a way of conceptualising, reasoning through, and discussing events (a “discursive genre) but, it also involves “a set of routine practices, a real structure of rewards, and a code of representation. It is a way of doing and being in corporations that partially structures small groups and conflicts with, and at times suppresses, each group’s other modes of thinking”. The prevailing marketing ideology is managerialistic.

The ‘market place’ is a popular model for a modern and efficient democratic mechanism. Stakeholders will vote with their feet (and money) if they do not like managers’ decisions. Corporations wishing to compete and managers desiring employment will be responsive to public desires. A public that does not respond will get the management they deserve. This thinking, apart from not truly explaining what actually happens, reduces democracy to capitalism and citizens to consumers.

Fundamentally, free-market capitalism was never supposed to represent the public well, but to describe how to make a profit on financial investment. Small wonder, then, that much marketing work has practices far removed from the attractive rhetoric of choice (written as freedom).

The market is a biased system of representation (Deetz, 1995). Groups in power control pricing and accounting practices. Managers often choose personal gains above choices that are economically rational for their employing corporation. Mass advertising and information control distort the 'voting system', for example as vendor-driven sales dominate many industries. Choice in markets is directed to existing products with little clear public influence on what is to become available (products are offered when believed to be profitable for the provider). That competing self-interests work themselves out for the benefit of all in the market economy is a myth (Deetz, 1995). Social relations are subordinated to the presumed self-regulating market of economic relations. Deetz (1992, 1995) argues that far from an 'invisible hand', our market economies have a selective, ideologically-based visible managerial hand.

According to Deetz (1992), managerialism is characterised by:

- *the desire for control and economic goals*
- *a will to dominate, where the means to accomplish organisational goals (efficiency, rationality, conflict resolution or suppression) become ends in themselves*
- *the managerial prerogative to decide what is to be done, when, where, and by whom. This is an arbitrary privilege for articulating life/world issues in terms of corporate costs, shifting the decisional responsibility from other corporate members to the manager.*
- *A cognitive-instrumental mode of reasoning, based on the belief that if one can completely understand all work processes, one can completely control them. Instrumental- technical reasoning aims at control, mastery, growth and material gain. It claims that values are in ends and that means are neutral*
- *power and money are the means to translate practical reasoning (pursuit of meaningful existence; satisfaction of social and symbolic needs; attempt to reach understanding; ends orientation) into instrumental reasoning. Everything that cannot be adequately translated into money, or has elements beyond managerial control is suppressed. For example, conflicts over values that are difficult to mediate tend to be suppressed through naturalisation, neutralisation, or subjectification*
- *efficiency remains above moral reproach. Co-ordination is achieved by distorting or suppressing some conflicts, especially those that defy the routinisation and present alternative forms of rationality*
- *the pursuit of pleasure in the service of efficiency. Meaningful work, participation in decision-making, and the enhancement of the autonomy of personnel are goods if they are strategic means to technical-instrumental control. There is no genuine concern for others' rights*
- *the formal organisation is its favoured site of reproduction. Authority and subordination are the preferred ways to represent the functional relations in corporations because this hierarchical basis assures managerial superiority*
- *managerialism is legitimated by all the members of the corporation, who accept it as natural and necessary without question its practise.*

Deetz (1992) argues that within managerialism lies the ground for the systematic distortion of communication within corporations and markets. This is because, from a participative perspective, communication problems arise as a consequence of value discussion and conflict preclusion. Systems of domination usually preclude genuine conversation. In that managerialistic performance consensus is reached through authority and asymmetric power relations.

Genuine conversation entails for all the participants:

1. symmetrical distribution of the opportunities to express ones ideas and opinions, and to choose what to say. Access to meaningful forums and channels of communication; equal access to communication technologies and distribution of training opportunities, etc.
2. freedom from privileged preconceptions concerning the understanding and representation of the external world, i.e. from ideologies that would privilege one form of discourse, disqualify certain possible participants, and universalise any particular sectional interest
3. the opportunity to establish legitimate social relations and norms for conduct and interaction. Rights and responsibilities are negotiated through interaction. Authority legitimation is earned with trust and natural leadership
4. freedom from coercive and hegemonic processes, to allow participants to express their own authentic interests, needs, and feelings.

"Communication is distorted whenever genuine conversation is precluded"
(Deetz, 1992).

Furthermore, a *participatory* communication practice requires an ongoing production of mutual understanding through the common formation of meaning and normative values. Conversely, the mechanistic, one-sided, 'arrow' managerial vision of effective communication is based primarily on reproductive fidelity, on the successful presentation of one's own meaning or point of view. In addition, the natural asymmetry and subordination of the manager-employee relationship makes arbitrariness possible, and could foster explicit strategic manipulation and instrumental uses of communication, for example, precluding conflict that challenges 'the institutional view'.

However, as Deetz emphasised, 'the more serious issues' rely on "the invisible constraints to richer understanding", where "strategy and manipulation are disguised, and control is exercised through manipulations of the natural, neutral, and self-evident". "Systematically distorted communication operates like strategic manipulation, but without overt awareness". For example, the members of a corporation or market do not see the adopted methods of control as a violation of basic moral rights or misrepresentation of interests (Deetz, 1992). In fact, they accept them as natural, thus providing a false consensus.

Human communication and modern 'organisations' are full of dysfunctional systematic distortions: "We see people unwittingly act in opposition to their own values and needs" (Deetz, 1992). Habermas (1984), described this situation thus:

“Such communication pathologies [systematic distortion] can be conceived of as the result of a confusion between actions oriented to reaching understanding [communicative action] and actions oriented to success [strategic actions]. In situations of concealed strategic action [manipulation], at least one of the parties operates with an orientation to success, but leaves others to believe that all the presuppositions of communicative action are satisfied. On the other hand, [in systematically distorted communication] at least one of the parties is deceiving himself [sic] about the fact that he is acting with an appearance of communicative action”.

Systematic communication distortions are produced by the structural and legitimated way of being and doing in corporations, and are thus protected from assessment (Deetz, 1992). They are by-products of the monopolisation of exchanges, and of the opportunities to define the corporation and their goals as well as the latent strategic normalisation and routinisation of potential conflict suppression. For example, corporation members do not elect directors, but nobody questions their authority.

Active processes of ‘discursive closure’ (Deetz, 1992) take place to avoid the expression of different ideas, interests, and opinions and its open negotiation, although individuals believe they are engaging in communication action for the pursuit of mutual understanding. In all of them, the latent prejudice, preconception, predefined personal identity, or one-sidedness in the reproduction of meaning, precludes responsiveness to an exterior, and therefore, scarce learning.

To improve the quality of working and trading life, there is a need of a more democratic and ‘moral communicative practice’ fundamentally rooted in corporate citizenship. Freed from the domination of arbitrary privileged considerations, it should enable equal participation in the construction of meaning and identity, and in the definition of the good and the right. This implies the open presentation of the values and criteria used in decision-making, and the “recovery of conflicts that have been suppressed through systematic distortion of communication” (Deetz, 1992) (so as not to have to confront hard questions and diversity).

The Necessary Re-conception of Communication in Management

Buttle’s (1995) review of the treatment of ‘marketing communications’ in marketing textbooks showed that very few marketing specialists have attempted to produce comprehensive, integrative theory for marketing communication at both the interpersonal and mediated levels. He found that whilst all of the 101 texts he surveyed tried to provide some theoretical basis for the development of managerial strategies, many did so only implicitly and did not explicitly recognise the theoretical origins or grounds of their discussion. Buttle shows that the work of Wilbur Schramm (first published in 1948) has been by far the most widely adopted in promoting a set of communication practices designed to produce cognitive, affective, or behavioural outcomes among a specified internal or external target audience. This conclusion can be applied to the explanation of communication in management generally.

Telephone engineer Claude Shannon also provided a theory of communication in which: “The fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point” (1949).

Weaver, in the same book, defines communication as “all of the procedures by which one mind may affect another”.

The work of Shannon & Weaver and of Schramm remains disproportionately influential and is still the main basis of the prevailing orthodoxy in the consideration of the communication aspects of marketing and management. Although Schramm did update his thinking (1971) to spell the demise of the earlier ‘bullet theory of communication’, he still retained the encoder-message-decoder model, and this has become firmly entrenched in management and marketing texts. In fairness, Schramm’s thinking did shift to communication as “a relationship, an act of sharing, rather than something which someone does to someone else” (1971, p. 8). This was a considerable development from the earlier view that communication was a ‘magic bullet’ (Klapper’s 1960 term “hypodermic effect” also become popular in mass communication studies) that “transferred ideas or feelings or knowledge or motivations from one mind to another” (Schramm, 1971, p. 8). Communication came to be seen, by some, as the study of people in relationship. Indeed, Schramm claimed that all communication necessarily functions within a broader framework of social relations: the physical/spatial relationship between sender and receiver; the situational context; role expectations; and, social norms. Yet, this conclusion and essential orientation has not yet percolated into most business and management texts. Another problem remaining is that some texts have taken either an interpersonal or mediated communication perspective, thus failing, one way or the other, to cope with the diversity of activities that fall within the field of managed communication.

Buttle highlights the problem that the very themes and assumptions upon which marketing and marketing communication textbooks are designed (he terms this *normal marketing communication theory*) have been questioned by contemporary communication theorists. The wider communication literature can better deal with the weaknesses and omissions of popular (textbook versions of) marketing communication theory. What resides in most marketing textbooks is outdated, ill-informed, and in need of revision.

In the wider field of management, most writers treat communication as informational. For example, in a case study that examines the relationship between culture, communication, and information, Brown & Starkey (1994) see the organisation as a “meanings system” and “information processor”. Following the information tradition, Daft & Weick (1984) conceived of ‘organizations’ as complex interpretive systems that transform environmental information into strategic business decisions. But, points out Deetz (1995), when communication is confused with information processing, sensitivity to political issues is left out. This perspective disregards the manner by which data and information are socially constructed, taking the environment as objective and objectifying communication content.

The small number of texts that deal specifically with the related field of corporate communication are also, mostly, trapped in an ‘informational’ perspective. For example, van Riel (1995) suggests that “information [is] transmitted during the process of communication”, whilst Horton (1995) takes an economic approach to the management of communication that is necessarily premised on packages of information which he terms “messages”. Argenti (1997) apparently sees no need to

raise any question over the nature of human communication – it is to be taken-for-granted. Both Heath (1994) and Deetz (1992, 1995) are the exceptions, each providing a critique on what is to be taken as communication and the political and ethical consequences of this selection. Mantovani (1996) and Krugman (1977) both eschewed the notion of *transportation* in favour of *transformation* as a model of the process of communication. Deetz (1992) warns us of the consequences of conceiving communicating as the transportation of knowledge and information and not as participation in constructing identity, meaning, and knowledge.

A Contemporary Perspective on Communication and Managing

Proceeding from Buttle's end-view, we need an *abnormal* communication theory for managing and marketing. A social constructionist perspective, hinted at by Schramm, but not picked up by most subsequent textbook authors or their readers, offers this improvement.

Social approaches to communication are in opposition to a psychological approach, and characterised as 'organic' rather than 'mechanistic', concerned with 'ritual' rather than 'transmission', and fundamentally 'interpretive' rather than 'scientific' or 'functional'. Leeds-Hurwitz (1995) provides a comprehensive collection of essays around this 'new paradigm' (see also Gergen, 1999).

Social approaches to communication describe events occurring between people in the process of interacting. Interpretation focuses on the way individuals make sense of their work through their communicative behaviours. This is in contrast to the reporting of how events are perceived and understood by a single person. Thus, communication is thought of as inherently collaborative and co-operative visible behaviour (inter-action), rather than as merely personal cognition. Social Communication Theory (Sigman, 1987) suggests that communication is not to be taken, in reductionist fashion, as a process through which individual cognitions are exchanged, or as a process of information transmission between isolated 'senders' and 'receivers'. Rather, interpersonal behaviour is a moment in social communication. A particular definition of what constitutes communication is adopted. This focuses on process as well as product or outcome. For example, Carey (1975) defines communication as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed" (see also Carey, 1989).

Social reality is not seen as a fact or set of facts existing prior to human activity - it is created in human interaction (see Berger & Luckmann (1966), for the classic exposition of this view, and Gergen (1985)). Berger and Luckmann analysed knowledge in society in the context of a theory of society as a dialectical process between objective and subjective reality. They concluded that people interact and produce meaningful behaviour patterns that construct a shared reality. Thus, we create our social world through our words and other symbols and through our behaviours. Such an approach requires that we question the validity of traditional "scientific" experiments. The business of the interpretivist is not to reveal the world to us but to create some part of the world for us: "Inquiry is the professional practice of the social creation of reality" (Anderson, 1990, p. 14). Interaction is forwarded as a creative social accomplishment. Deetz feels very strongly that "If the study of human communication is not ultimately the study of how we *make* the world in which we

have our human existence, then it is as trivial as our dominant “model” of it would seem to say it is” (Deetz, 1995, p. 130). Further, “Communication, then, is the process in which we create and maintain the “objective” world, and, in doing so, create and maintain the only human existences we can have” (Deetz, 1995, p. 203).

The central problem attended to is how social meanings are created. The focus is on people not as passive rule-followers operating within pre-existing regulations, but as active agents – rule-makers within social contexts. Identity is seen as a social construction, and the study of social role and cultural identity leads to the study of power and what happens when particular identities are chosen or ascribed by others. The concept of culture is central and is defined as the knowledge that people must learn to become appropriate members of a given society. Cultural contexts include the community in which particular communicative behaviours arise. Social approaches are mostly holistic – the study of interaction requires the whole picture to understand how the multiple components are related.

Reddy (1993) observed that our major metaphor for communication takes ideas as objects that can be put into words, language as their container, thought as the manipulation of these objects, and memory as storage. Thus, in this view we send ideas in words through a conduit – a channel of communication – to someone else who then extracts the ideas from the words. A consequence of this metaphor is that we believe that ideas *can* be extracted and can exist independently of people. We also expect that when communication occurs someone extracts the same idea from the language that was put in by someone else. Meaning is taken to be a thing. But the conduit metaphor hides all of the effort that is involved in communication, and many people take it as a definition of communication.

Mantovani (1996) heralds the obsolescence of the *old model of communication* as the transfer of information from one person to another. No longer should we be satisfied with an outmoded model which conceives of communication as the transportation of an inert material - the information that actors exchange with each other - from one point to another along a ‘pipeline’. There is in this view no account of the co-operation that stimulates reciprocal responsibility for interaction and the series of subtle adaptations, which occur among ‘interlocutors’. Nor does the old model consider that communication is possible only to the extent that participants have some common ground for shared beliefs, they recognise reciprocal expectations, and accept rules for interaction which anchor the developing conversation. The old theory of communication treats knowledge as an object (i.e. as a body of information as independent facts to be processed) existing independently of the participants that can be carried through channels and possessed by a receiver when communication is successful. The *alternative conception of communication* is of a common construction of meanings. Information is not moved from one place to another - it is always a means to an end, produced and used by social actors to attain their goals in daily life. Knowledge arises out of action – what we know is bound up with what we do (Weick, 1979, 1995). Knowledge is a social phenomenon:

“We collectively know not just something more but something different from what any of us individually knows” (Taylor, 1999).

The Fetish of Information Transfer

Why do so many of us retain the outmoded way of thinking of communication? The conduit metaphor of communication, shows Deetz (1992), is thoroughly taken-for-granted in institutional structures and everyday thinking, aligning well with dominant power structures and liberal notions of democracy. It supports the dominant group (i.e. the management group *is* the corporation) in accomplishing control over those they choose to subordinate (employees, customers, suppliers, etc.). We retain a conception of the communicative process that gives liberal guidance to communicative practice - in the face of corporations as communication systems of control. We misconceive of how human perception and expression work. Yet, the denial of democracy is an everyday occurrence not necessarily done for the purpose of control. A web of strategic moves of asymmetrical power-based relationships is enacted through discursive practices - managed (corporate) communication is needed to avoid managerialistic (the traditional 'corporate') communication. In the marketplace, it is to the advantage of the seller to have the potential consumer understand and 'own' his/her interpretation of the 'message' (and the brand).

The contemporary everyday conception of interacting with others through effective communication is conceptually flawed as the basis for participatory democracy (purported to be found in the illusionary exchange-based free market). Identity is fixed in distorted communication systems, and actors are denied the possibility of regaining (constructive) conflict and self-formation. Counter to the common-sense view, communication is not for self-expression but for 'self'-destruction - a social act to overcome one's fixed subjectivity, one's conceptions, one's strategies. Identity, meaning, and knowledge are opened to the indeterminacy of people and the external environment. Market relations are, then. negotiated, rather than manipulated.

Our everyday work experience includes the self-deception that individuals are engaging in communication action in pursuit of mutual understanding, when they are actually engaged in concealed strategic action (even concealed from themselves) – resulting from confusing the pursuit of mutual understanding with the pursuit of success. What is missing is a productive rather than a reproductive conception of communication as the fundamental process by which mutual understanding arises in regard to the subject matter rather than in the sharing of opinions. *Conversation* is the ongoing process of creating mutual understanding through the open formation of experience.

Our conception of communication (and thus of marketing) has not always been as it is presently taken-for-granted. Communication has been invented and reinvented to suit the concerns of the era (see Mattelart, 1996, for a highly readable historical account of the invention and re-inventions of the concept of communication). Perhaps the realisation that our image of 'communication' is not fixed – that our understanding is particular to where and when we examine the concept – may free our thinking to imagine communicating in a more productive fashion.

Brown (see Brown et al, 1996) is concerned about the "intellectual necrophilia" of those who 'dig up' dead ideas. Maybe things do go around in cycles - not dying, but waiting in the wings for an opportune moment to play a new role. In 1931, the American Marketing Association defined marketing as:

“all the business activities implicated in the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer, with the sole exception of activities that imply a change in form” (Maynard, 1932).

In this view, the corporation is a marketing-producing system (all other activities are part of these linked systems). As Mattelart's history of the communication concept tells us:

“The task marketing assumed was to guarantee the conditions of communication and information that allow demand to be met” (1996, p. 292).

Contemporary managerial ideology casts marketing communication as managed promotional activities, almost all of which are advertising and sales promotion. Somewhere along in the (supposed) evolution of marketing management, the activities necessary in advance of announcement and expression of product offers have been extracted from the marketing system. Marketers communicate on-behalf-of the seller. Has representation of buyers and consumers been forgotten or discarded? Marketing praxis has become intervention in markets, and in so becoming has become narrowed to merely (cynical?) expression of self-interests and the provocation to purchase. How much market research really allows customers and consumers a part in the governance of exchange?

Must we ignore that in a system of exchange (a market system), *either party* may take the initiative in the relationship or in need/solution identification? The traditional notion of a seller always taking the marketing initiative in making an offer (a promise) to which a buyer responds is being challenged. As you might expect, we should identify changes in consumer attitude and behaviour, the marketplace, and providers. The number of people who defer to the offerings of providers is declining - more of us are *active consumers* who know what we want and what we will pay for it. We can expect further shift towards buyer-initiated relationships (the tradition has been to think of marketing as initiated by the seller).

Today many buyers are more realistically seen as often active searchers for suppliers and their products to fulfil their needs. This phenomenon is termed '*reverse marketing*', 'proactive procurement', 'proactive purchasing', and 'buyer initiative' (Leenders and Blenkhorn, 1988) in recognition that once a relationship has been established, either part may initiate an interaction event or episode in the expectation of a response from the other. When this occurs, the provider has to respond through a *reactive marketing* process. However, this is a passive strategy that will not attract buyers to form trading relationships with the corporation as seller.

Although this situation has been recognised, particularly in industrial and business-to-business marketing management, it has largely been taken to be the adoption of a marketing-like system by buyers in order to persuade an attractive supplier to supply.

What has largely been missed is that this concept of reverse marketing suggests that marketing communication systems must be able to cater for buyer-initiated interaction. Often, this responsibility for communicative interaction has been located with a customer service group and treated as an administrative task. Thus, the

marketing communication system must be receptive as well as expressive - and providers need to expect that in some situations buyers will be hunting for suitable suppliers. Surely, this presents an (often unrecognised) opportunity for many supposedly customer-oriented corporations. Promise-making may have to be more receptive, accommodating, and responsive. These are all questions of communication system capability.

Of course, had marketing (and management) thinking not been locked in the managerialistic 'conduit' or 'transmission' metaphor mode of thinking about communication, then this would have been more prominently recognised long ago. Communication then is the 'ritual' mode of creating mutual meaning(s) (Carey, 1989). Marketing and communication systems will have to provide facilities for both parties to initiate exchange relationships.

Marketing as a Knowledge Transformation System

A useful way of thinking about the corporate system is from a knowledge perspective. Wikström and Normann (1994) model the corporation as part of a value creation network that organises processes of generation, production, and representation and creates value by transforming knowledge. This approach differs from the traditional supply chain management view that is linear, monological, and fragmented, emphasising persuasion and 'informing'. Instead, a holistic, dialogical, integrated, synchronous, and reciprocal system of knowledge exploitation is envisaged. Within this, corporate conversations take place to generate knowledge, make offerings, and exchange valued goods and services (tangible and intangible products). There is temporal integration between the three basic processes, operating within a web of interacting knowledge transformation systems (see Figures 1, 2, and 3).

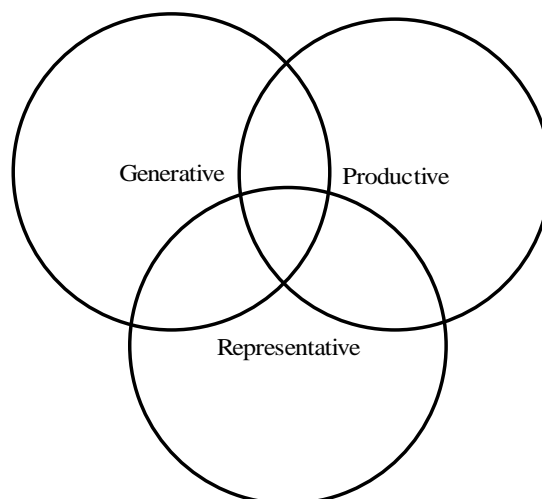


Figure 1: The knowledge system processes

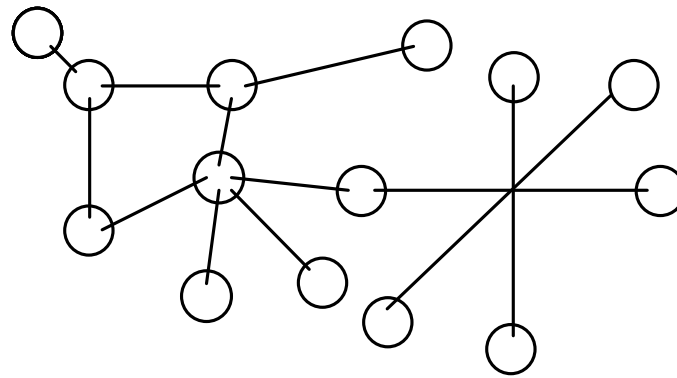
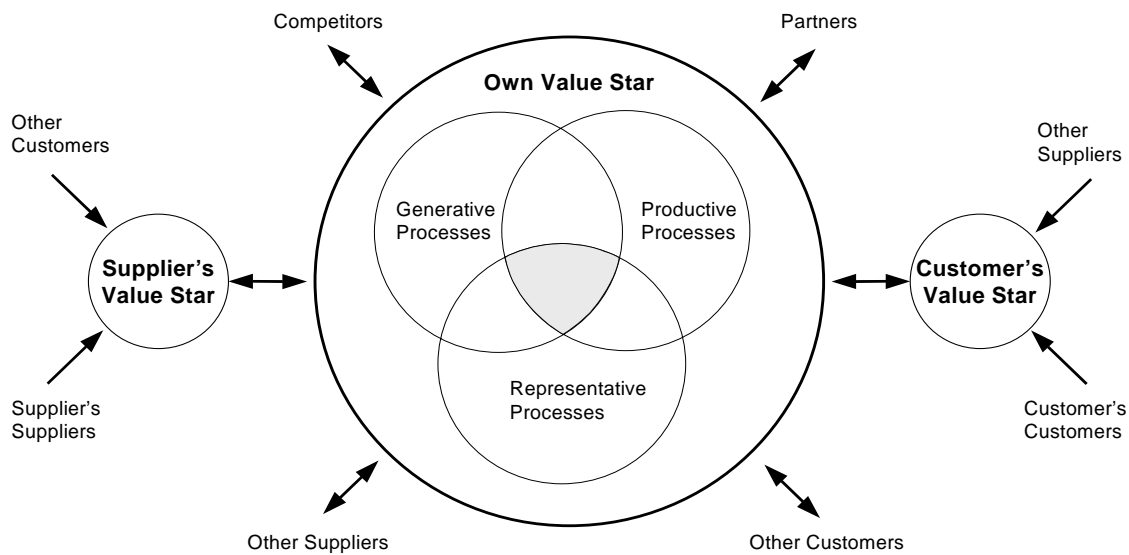


Figure 2: A value star network



Source: Wikstrom and Norman, 1994.

Figure 3: The network as a knowledge-creating value star (from Swan et al, 2000)

The corporate knowledge transformation network cannot be properly explained with a objective information transmission model. Objective informing does not take account of the cognitive transformation of data to information, and subsequently to meaning within a social context.

Marketing as an Appreciative System

The work of Sir Geoffrey Vickers on a general theory of the social process has largely been ignored (wrongly) by academics, particularly in the UK. He refused to adopt the reductionist thinking of the establishment, who sought academic respectability by applying the quantitative methods of the physical sciences in treating natural, man-made, and human systems as the same. Vickers would not countenance such a view, preferring to adopt an *inclusive approach* of systemic thinking. In doing so he was able to examine complex, rich situations to understand their internal and external relationships, reciprocal interactions, and underlying commonalities. In considering corporate human governance and management decision-making, Vickers identified

an additional aspect of human systems that was missing from the more mechanistic perspective of scientific measurement of variables. Vickers argued that a human system, as a network of relationships, has judgement, which is rooted in its history (past) and culture (present), and influences decisions made in the system. The *appreciative framework* of the human system develops a unique way for the system of looking at the world with its own values and standards. Because this is unique to human systems, argued Vickers, such systems cannot be subsumed within other systems. He also rejected Herbert Simon's goal-seeking model of human behaviour (1960) as being "too poverty-stricken to match the richness of life as we experience it" (Checkland and Holwell, 1998, p. 47). Vickers (1965, 1968, 1970, 1984) and Silverman (1970) share this concern over the limitations of systems theory when applied to human collectives.

Vickers (1965) showed that a judgement has three reciprocally interacting strands:

- *A judgement of what is ('reality') based on notions of cause-and-effect and beliefs.*
- *An assessment of what might be, could be, or should be (value) based on self-interest, moral constraints, and individual and group goals.*
- *The instrumental means for getting from 'what is' to 'what could be' or 'what should be', within the constraints of available resources.*

The appreciative system determines what facts (data) we select (perceive) from all of those in a situation, the meaning we give them, and the means we use to reduce the mismatch between existing and desired situations. Vickers realised that we did not even have a name for the state in our minds which is the outcome of past communication and the target and interpreter of present communication. This state accounts for almost everything we do and are – in terms of feelings, thoughts and actions. Vickers called the state an *appreciative system*. The term appreciation captures the connotations of interest, discrimination and valuation. Thus in the exercise of judgement the categories and criteria which tacitly determine what we notice, how we discriminate situations from the general confusion of ongoing event, and how we regard them, constitute a system because they are mutually related – a change in one affects the others. Appreciative settings lead to particular features of situations and the situations themselves, being noticed and judged in particular ways by standards built up from previous experience. In ensuing discourse, accommodations are reached which lead to action, and the settings and standards themselves may be altered. Thus there is no fixed social reality – it changes through the social process. Appreciative settings apply to the individual and to the group and the corporation as a whole. The notion that all members share the same settings and are thus able to collaborate unambiguously is rather naïve.

Traditionalist scientists would ignore much of this because such social phenomena cannot be easily treated as objective and thus cannot be accessed and evaluated through measurement; yet to ignore the effect of culture in decision-making is to remove the possibility of understanding how our belief systems affect our decisions. Where attempts have been made, the concept of 'culture' has been reified as an objective fact, rather than recognised as a social construction.

Vickers emphasised *interdependence*, realising that this highlights the rights and responsibilities inherent in membership of a healthy community. Of course, interdependence means that there is no ultimate freedom or autonomy, but rather 'man-in-society'. Interdependence both liberates and constrains. 'man' produces society and is produced by society. Yet, freedom itself is not simply absence of restraints (Mulgan, 1997).

Vickers saw everything in terms of processes and reciprocal interactions. This led him to examine the effect of rapid technological advance on social systems (1968) and what he saw as a threat to stable relationships between human society and its ecological milieu (1970). 'Green' governance is not an idea of the 1990s! The appreciative systems concept is of fundamental importance to managers, who must understand their own value systems and those of the people whom they look to for productive activity if they are to communicate with them. Vickers insisted that there is a need for managers to share or at least account for compatible cultural values. Leadership must respect and welcome diversity, yet bring to the fore those values that will build the team spirit for effective and satisfying co-operative performance. Reciprocal interchange (real communication!) enriches constituent cultures, yet has to be underpinned by basic commonalities for consensus and joint action.

With the relics of 'macho management' and the Enlightenment's notion of human autonomy still hiding in the dark recesses of the contemporary business enterprise, interdependence is felt by some managers to be a personal weakness. Many still think in terms of command and obedience, but must recognise and act upon their inescapable interdependence in organising and producing. Leaders and followers, manages and managed – all are interdependent – in reciprocal relationships. It is this mutuality that regulates relationships, and can build mutual knowledge and understanding and create initiative and enterprise. The Corporate Communication managing system (CCMS) to be proposed is a participatory system to replace the outmoded control system version of managing and marketing.

Whereas Simon's (1960) model has managers seeking to achieve goals, Vickers saw managers as setting standards or norms rather than goals. The focus on goals is replaced by a focus on managing relationships according to standards generated by previous history. Those who participate in the discussion and debate that leads to action are making appreciative judgements. Social action, then according to Vickers' interpretive approach, is based on personal and collective sensemaking, and, like Karl Weick (1979, 1995), takes organisation to be a process. To date, Vickers' work has regrettably not been as influential as that of Simon's, however Checkland and Holwell and this author are helping to change that! Others have begun to explore in a more humanistic frame outside the conventional positivistic hypothesis-testing norm. Essentially, the view is taken that organisation is a network of conversations or communicative exchanges in which commitments are generated (see Checkland and Holwell, 1998; Ciborra, 1996, for example).

Figure 4 identifies the marketing system as a system of appreciation.

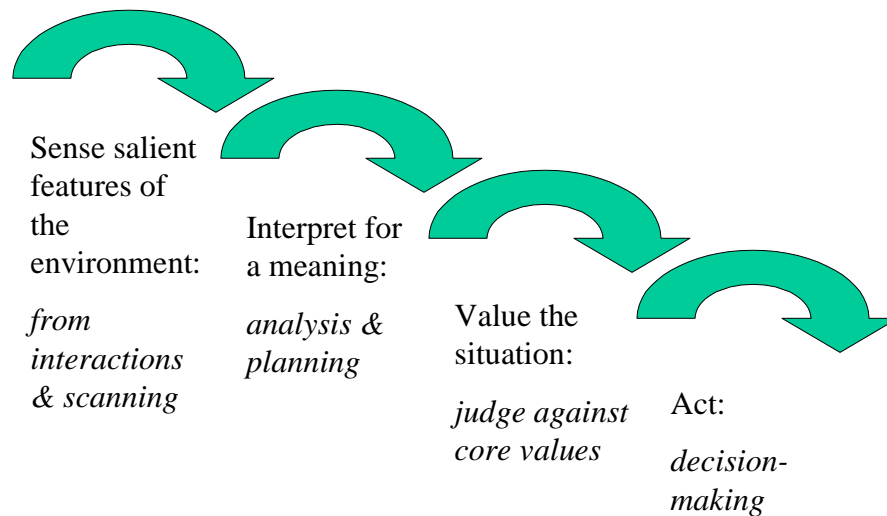


Figure 4: Marketing as an appreciative system

Integration: The Corporate Communication Managing System

Some 30 years have passed since Bower (1966) offered a simple programmed management system to stimulate the inspiration of individuals to give their best efforts towards achieving group objectives, whilst requiring them to adhere to corporate philosophy and to follow strategic plans, policies, and procedures in accordance with established standards.

Bower's wide consulting experience with McKinsey & Co. had revealed all too many instances of a lack of will to manage and the absence of effective basic managing processes. Too much effort was being put by senior executives into operating work, to the neglect of developing managing processes by which all members of the corporation can contribute to achieving the objectives of the enterprise and assuring its success.

Bower observed that failure to establish and maintain effective processes was often because of a lack of *will to manage* amongst managers. Bower also provides the link to communication (1966, p. 16):

"No business, regardless of type or size, can maximise its success in the long run unless its managing processes deal effectively with the ambitions, abilities, strengths, indifferences, inertias, weaknesses, fears, and foibles of (its) people".

In terms of the membership of the enterprise system, the function of the managing system is to get people to plan, decide, and act effectively, in the interest of the enterprise, because they like and want to. The system must help them determine

what activities to perform and to how perform these activities well. The system should also help the corporation attract and retain high-calibre people as productive workers. As far as the system is concerned with other people not employed by the corporation, decisions and actions are made consciously within the web that includes other (external) stakeholders.

The corporate enterprise has two primary communication sub-systems that are inter-related. The internal system directs activities of organising to accomplish goals that are based on the gathering and interpretation of data on expectations and attitudes, and on conditions, from the corporation's relevant environment through external channels of communication. External channels of communication are also used to present relevant information about the internal processes of the corporation to the relevant external environment to attempt to influence the behaviour of the various publics. Internal communication processes are directed towards establishment of structure and stability in organising, while external communication processes are directed towards innovation by facilitating identification of directions for corporate development (Kreps, 1990). Managers and leaders seek co-operation for a productive balance between stability and innovation.

Traditionally, departments and narrow specialist groups operating in institutional 'silos' are seen as in competition: for supremacy; to protect their "turf"; to secure credibility; for "a seat at the Boardroom table"; to secure "the ear of the dominant coalition"; or simply for resources. However, a model of integrated communication systems seeks to build bridges between the 'islands of communication', and to eventually establish new task groupings, perhaps by way of cross-functional working in the interim. As corporations re-engineer working arrangements and formal structure around business processes, so they should re-engineer their communications management into a truly corporate (sub-)system for managing. Kreps (1990) sees divisions between communication systems as artificial and traditionalist, and no longer relevant.

Departments should not be allowed to seek independence and the concern of managers is not to be encroachment, but how to remove barriers to real co-operative working so that communication really can add value to business enterprise. The CCMS framework is intended to avoid the engagement of non-specialists in competition for the management of traditional specialist communication departments, but rather seeks to foster greater recognition of corporate dependencies and shared organisational (business) goals, and to make stronger, direct linkages between those who need to communicate and those who are charged with enabling and facilitating these interactions. A value-creation perspective on the departmentalisation issue is required if the power-control assumptions and desires of the traditionalist manager are to be overcome for the benefit of the corporate community. This will require that managers recognise the *Corporate Communication managing system* as central to the work of the enterprise community. The Corporate Communication approach enables the reconciliation of social and economic interests, for business is in reality a socio-economic institution upon which we are all dependent, and may allow the vista of a 'life ethic' to temper the debilitating effects of the mutation of citizens into consumers.

The interests of the few (corporate owners, managers, and their customers) are no longer given greater value than the interests of the many (all other stakeholders) are.

Arrogant managers who do not value relationships and stakeholders' interests (or even stakeholders themselves), and do not value leadership and other change-oriented behaviours will find it more difficult to keep their license to operate.

Carroll's (1993) stakeholder view of the firm requires that managers see stakeholder groups and their sub-groups, at least until the legitimacy of claims and respective power have been examined, as both:

1. *those who the management group thinks has some stake (an interest, right, or ownership) in the firm*
2. *those groups that themselves think they have some stake in the firm.*

It is then necessary to examine the nature of each relationship, as well as recognising that some stakeholder groups also have relationships with each other. Stakeholder expectations cannot be ignored, but can be missed and/or misinterpreted.

The corporation becomes defined by its links to its stakeholders and binds them into constructive relationships, not always based on agreement, through the design of its communication systems.

Those that have shaped their network of relationships and the processes through which they enact their value-creating projects, have better understood the nature of information, knowledge and relation, and in doing so have abandoned the older models of organisation.

The corporation is imagined to be a social system or society. The corporation is imagined as a set of nested systems, each dealing with an external sector of the environment (Daft and Weick, 1984). The corporation is a coupled set of zones of meaning. The corporation can be conceived as a dynamic 'communicational' whole (a system). We can gain by adopting such a network-based model of management to replace the now outmoded notion of compartmentalised organisation of work.

Our use of our language has such a powerful influence on our thinking that we can make the necessary shift in our expectations and strategies largely by using different terminology. Instead of speaking of the 'organisation' (as though it were a machine), we can talk about the *enterprise ecology* we value and desire. By this is meant value-creating activity managed in relation to the surroundings. Prosperity of the people who are interdependent is the central goal, and this is gauged in more than economic terms since overall quality of working life and contribution to a corporate community is beneficial to all participants.

In the natural run of things, the various *zones of meaning* (Heath, 1994) become differentiated and idiosyncratic. The corporation is the entire set of relationships among a particular set of stakeholders (Mitroff, 1983). Organising, then, is negotiation – the corporation is a network of ongoing negotiated enactments of stakeholder interests.

The corporation is a network of coupled zones of meaning, i.e. an interpretive system. The management task is to strengthen the coupling, to enable the

negotiation of zones of meaning or 'life spaces' (a term used by Kurt Lewin) into compatibility to ensure sufficient co-operation for the achievement of personal and corporate enterprise goals.

Making sense of what is going on around us is necessary for us to act towards the realisation of our desired state. Meanings must be the product of narratives enacted by managers with employees (Smircich, 1983). There must be voice-to-voice dialectic. Democratic communication is about the formation of knowledge, experience, and identity, and not merely their expression (Deetz, 1992). Shared understanding may not be necessary. Managing a business enterprise is concerned with the purposive deployment of frames of meaning, through active and selective interpretation of events, expectations, and intentions. We try to bring people together to co-operate in executing collective tasks and must face a variety of 'fields of experience' or 'personal cultures'. The humane way to get the job done is not through people but with people. Our communication must create productive *inter-action*.

Management efforts should foster boundary-spanning to facilitate the flow of vital information and a sense of meaning that fosters cohesiveness. To survive and prosper a corporation needs a shared appreciative system or a set of compatible appreciative systems (Vickers, 1984) that can turn data about phenomena, events, relationships, and expectations, into decisions on how to act.

Common starting points (van Riel, 1995) provide the structure for sufficient co-ordination and coherence in working to ensure that enough of the communication that is desired and takes place is:

"harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent" (p. 1).

However, it has to be noted that it is the operation of the systems for communicating that are harmonised, not merely message content or channels. We have seen that the price to pay in pursuing a narrow, closed, mechanistically controlled environment is too high for the people who desire the creation and delivery of valued contributions to personal goals. A "reputation czar" (Fombrun, 1995) takes overall responsibility for communication system performance and building communicative competence at corporate, process, and performer levels.

By seeking productive participatory processes we can gain the benefits that authentic, ethical communication experiences bring to people. Otherwise we lose the possibility of creating and experiencing opportunities to be who we are.

Figure 5 illustrates the inclusive marketing system dynamically learning with each customer as encounters within the context of the exchange relationship construct ("design"), transform ("produce"), and embed ("deliver") knowledge, thus transforming the relationship.

From integrated marketing communication to the total communication managing system

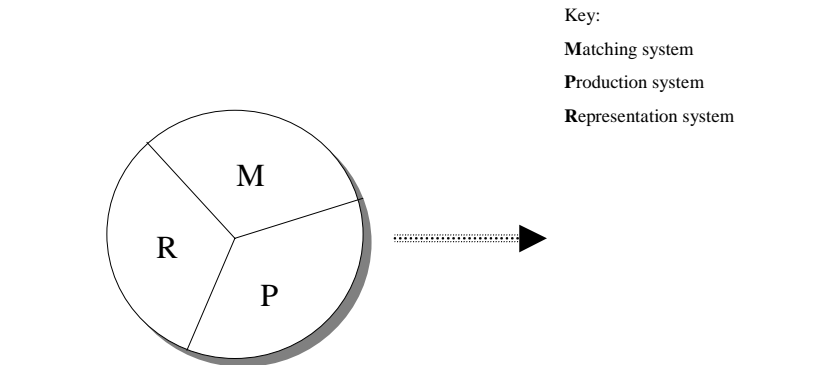


Figure 5: The dynamic total communication system

The traditional “marketing mix” is updated from a PPPP classification to a RMP classification. The matching system takes care of research, design, and other constructive (“creative”/“innovative”) actions. The production system manufactures, transports, installs, and maintains the ‘products’. The representation system ensures that the purposes of the exchange relationship are highly articulated (in several senses: joined; spoken; intelligible).

Figure 6 illustrates the marketing communication web in which marketing is once more taken to be the agency of exchange encounters, and not a ‘persuasion mill’. For a fascinating historical account of this original role see Mattelart (1996).

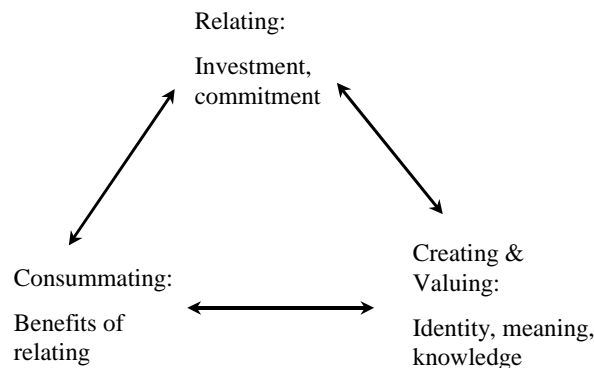


Figure 6: Marketing as the agency of exchange encounters

Conclusion: Implications of discarding the hegemony of the orthodoxy in reclaiming authentic exchange in managed marketing communication

Marketing communication is the term used almost universally to signify a collection of promotional activities aimed at profitably selling products. However, it takes little thought to realise that marketing is itself a special case of a human communication system. All marketing activities, centred on exchange, are communicative within a relationship. Indeed, a 'marketing' programme that is merely expressive is not marketing and is an institutionalised distorted communication system (Deetz, 1992) – that is, driven by the pursuit of an imbalance of power. Mintzberg (1983) argues, provocatively, that this pathology of managerialism is good for society since politicised working kills corporations that are not well suited to their environments. The Hartley & Pickton (1999) notion of a "mindscape of marketing communication" as "a way of describing the marketing communications mix" is a further step towards "integrated marketing communications", but is an illustrative example of a general failing to tell the whole story. They raise some important issues, but do not recognise critical underpinning questions. They are right in highlighting problems with vocabulary, but seem to miss the greater weakness of concept paucity. The nature and role of 'communication' is taken-for-granted, premised on a managerialistic ideology. Marketing communication is far more than consolidated and associated product promotion activities. The focus remains on "how to?", when there is critical a need in the emerging novel social context for business enterprise, to keep asking "why?". The more sophisticated "mindscape of marketing communications" is a further stepping stone towards a big social goal (sustainable business prosperity), but we must beware of stepping further down the wrong path! The question remains: "what is to be integrated?".

The problem of integrated operation is not merely a marketing problem – it is a management problem. Understood as a knowledge transformation system that creates value, the corporation is a dynamic network of generative, productive, and representative processes (Wikström & Normann, 1994) – an integrated network that has to be responsively and responsibly managed. Integrated diversity is necessary to operate business enterprise as a generator of innovation, responsiveness, flexibility, and learning, and requires much more than control, constraint, and compliance, within contracted (but basically adversarial) transactions (Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1997). An alternative participatory conception of 'communicating' is necessary to realise responsible responsiveness (Varey, 2000) beyond mere 'offer-making'. Sustainable prosperity requires renewal, and not merely refinement. The "integration" of marketing communication activities within the confines of a 'promotions mix' is an obstacle. Peter Drucker is more right than ever: "Marketing is the business-everything else is a cost" (paraphrased, with apologies!). Yet, many managers remain locked in the 'face to the CEO, ass to the customer' stance identified by GE's Jack Welch, and apparently complicit with hitting 'targets' (customers, as well as control measures). The *Corporate Communication Managing System* is a normative context-creating framework (Barnard, 1938) for the dialogical ethical management of productive integrated diversity (Varey, 1998). This requires the abandonment of the orthodox model of 'the organisation' and the orthodox 'transmission' metaphor for communication. Dialogue (communicative interaction) is the prime alternative participatory conception of (productive) communicating.

Too often the pragmatic marketing programme is little more than a systematically distorted communication system. This is a problem of both morality and expediency. People who operate self-referential systems premised on goal-directed persuasion that merely reproduces meaning do not truly have the right to claim other than that they are cynical managers, and will fall prey to the fatal conceit (Hayek, 1990).

But not all marketing management is closed. Why do some managers operate open systems? Guillen's (1994) comparative study identifies three models of management practice: scientific management; human relations; structural analysis. The social, political, economic milieu strongly influences the acceptance of a prevailing model. Religion, for example, guides beliefs about such aspects of life as "work ethic", notions of relating and social bonds, and so on. These management models are the basis of the conception of communication and hence of the marketing system. In the third millennium, can we look forward and take action to enable communication to escape tradition so that we can imagine it differently as 'reasoning together'. Both Mattelart (1996) and Thayer (1997) challenge us to do so - if marketing isn't dead, then maybe the academy and managers can promote the rediscovery of the productive communicative potential of the social process. Both sellers and buyers need reciprocal expressions and impressions, but within a truly democratic process, and not in a distorted system that promises just what it cannot (is not intended to) deliver. Communicative interaction is a more constructive basis for this than is interactive communication.

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