Gaining access to agency and structure in industrial marketing theory: a critical pluralist approach

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with gaining greater insight into the interplay between agency and structure in industrial marketing scholarship. The paper's intent is to embed Midgley's notion of critical pluralism within this endeavour. The paper commends the movement towards increased deployment of critical realism, but cautions against the dangers of creating further atomism in marketing theory by creating another paradigm of thought with crenellated boundaries, impervious to outside influence. The paper advances a case for critical pluralism within industrial marketing scholarship and offers a three dimensional, theoretical, methodical and methodological framework to aid such critical pluralism. The discussion demonstrates how such critical pluralism can be deployed to gain revelatory insight into agency and structure using a number of 'integrative' theoretical perspectives.

Introduction

Critical realism is an increasingly important theoretical perspective in industrial marketing scholarship. Indeed the authors feel that in this movement, industrial marketers are 'homing in' on something that could have extensive theoretical and practical value within the marketing discipline more broadly and perhaps even beyond the borders of the business disciplines. The increasing prominence of critical realism seems to acknowledge the value of empirical contributions that expose agency and structure in network and business interaction. Indeed the authors declare their support for such progress. However, we contend that the value of critical realism is in what it delivers, namely, insight into the interplay between agency and structure and it is this insight that should excite industrial marketing (IM) scholars rather than the deployment of a particular theoretical framework. There is a risk that in uncritically advocating critical realism to this end, a further atomistic paradigm of critical realism is created in competition with the already heavily entrenched 'dichotomy' of functionalism versus interpretivism, in essence creating 'trichotomy' for researchers to negotiate. Such entrenchment may close off a number of promising avenues for theory development capable of achieving revelatory insight into agency and structure that would otherwise be more accessible to IM scholars. If this entrenchment were to happen, a significant opportunity for IM scholars may be lost.

The embedded nature of industrial interactions means that such interactions have strong temporal and process implications and thus we propose − require imaginative but philosophically rigorous approaches to fully capture their dynamic and processual qualities. In particular, industrial interaction involves individual and organisational agency on the one hand, and institutional enablers and constraints on that agency on the other, so there is a real need for novel, non-dichotomous theoretical approaches: i.e., capable of integrating insights into both agency *and* structure. Due to the embedded nature of interaction, the case for integrative theory is more compelling in industrial marketing than in a consumer context. A further important contemporary debate in industrial marketing scholarship concerns the nature of general theory (see for instance Peters et al., 2013b). A call for more discussion of general theory is interpreted in this paper as a call for greater ontological coherence (the ability to hold, sustain and communicate an ontological position with an internally consistent logic) in theoretical contributions. A further concern of this paper is therefore how to achieve ontological coherence whilst explicitly integrating insights on agency and structure in theoretical contributions − given that these insights are usually found in separate, seemingly incommensurate paradigms. The purpose of this paper is therefore to present an integrating framework, through the use of which, greater and more diverse insight into the interplay between agency and structure in IM scholarship could be achieved. The argument is conceptual in nature and aims to provide a mature exploration of complex arguments that will allow future authors drawing on these principles when making empirical progress, the luxury of greater parsimony and reduced precocity by using the paper as a referential base-point.

The argument advanced here has work from three authors at its core. Midgley (2000) visualizes three dimensions of research design: theoretical, methodological and methodical. Of central concern to Midgley are issues of critical plurality at, and between these three dimensions. The opportunity for IM scholarship we identify in this paper is that offered first, by a plurality of paradoxical ontological perspectives

(incorporating agency and structure) within a single research design both between and within three dimensions of design, and second, enabling a plurality of different combinations (including at the philosophical dimension) to be used by different industrial marketing researchers in different boundaries to gain insight into the interplay between agency and structure. Midgley's notion of critical pluralism aids this endeavour by disavowing the need for meta-level discussion, and rejecting the need for paradigms, thus aiding commensurability between the assumptions traditionally grounded in competing paradigms. Noteboom (2004) proposes that incommensurability has two dimensions; the first of these is semantic incommensurability, essentially incompatibility of meaning; a second is axiological incommensurability, an incompatibility of underlying goals, values and assumptions, essentially the philosophical make-up of the paradigm itself. Throughout the paper we contextualize how a notion of critical pluralism can aid a greater degree of philosophical and semantic commensurability without seeking paradigm dissolution.

Our foundation stone within the industrial marketing literature is the work of our second key author, Easton (1995, 2002, 2010). Similar to Midgley, Easton has proposed that research problems be addressed at three levels: theoretical, methodological and procedural. To develop a notion of a plurality of pluralistic perspectives, we identify our third influential work as that of Pozzebon (2004, and colleagues in later work). Pozzebon juxtaposes several other important authors' integrative general theories/perspectives, referred to as 'integrative' because they bring together philosophical insights relating to agency and structure that are usually associated with separate paradigms. A journey through several disciplines led to the identification that a number of these potential integrative theories (and others) have been underutilized or unutilized in industrial marketing scholarship, critical realism being one such approach. The central pillar of our paper is therefore built around the work of Midgley, Easton and Pozzebon but upon which other fixtures and fittings are attached from other disciplines to make a coherent built whole. The central contribution of this paper is therefore a three dimensional (theoretical, methodological, and methodical) framework that allows an industrial marketing researcher to better consider the explicit link between integrative theories and meaningful empirical outcomes. Such a framework is not presented as a prescription, rather as a series of dimensions of decision to be considered by an industrial marketing researcher.

The paper is structured as follows: First, the conceptual underpinnings of the paper are explored, initially by outlining the attitude to voluntarism and determinism in industrial marketing discourse and the state of the art in respect of insight into the exposition of interplay between agency and structure. Midgley's notion of critical pluralism is then briefly outlined. In the remainder of the paper, the substance of our contribution is presented - a three dimensional framework which is explored in three subsequent sections. Finally we outline our conclusions and summarise the contributions made in proposing the framework outlined in the paper.

Conceptual background

Agency and structure in industrial marketing research

Underpinned by quantitative methodologies, the functionalist paradigm is the dominant one in Western social science (Tadajewski, 2008; Easton, 2010; Hanson & Grimmer, 2007), and is manifest within marketing as the Transaction Cost, Marketing Management or American School of thought (Gronroos, 1997; Palmer et al., 2005; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Functionalists believe that all observed phenomena have evolved to play a role within a set of wider systemic relationships, and explaining any phenomenon requires the identification of these roles. The associated ontological and epistemological assumptions are (i) that a real world exists, and (ii) that this world is reflected in our knowledge, even though it can never be perfectly accurate. However, rather than demonstrating a philosophical passion towards functionalism as a general theory, quantitative studies in marketing have often seemed to be a pragmatic, default position, perhaps due to pressure (often driven by tenure and promotional exigencies) to submit to high-prestige journals that have a tradition of publishing almost exclusively quantitative studies (thus concurring with comments across disciplines such as those by Anderson, 1995; Eisenhardt, 1991; Schurr, 2007; Shankar & Patterson, 2001; Sminia, 2009; Svensson, 2006; Tadajewski, 2008). Interpretivists, on the other hand, believe that all knowledge is constructed from particular subjective or inter-subjective perspectives. Tadajewski (2006: 430) for instance suggests that "the emphasis in interpretive research is on the de-emphasis of an external concrete social world". The associated assumptions are (i) that if a real world beyond our knowledge exists then the true nature of it is inherently unknowable, so (ii) we should always talk about what people believe rather than what is. Ontology is therefore collapsed into epistemology in the interpretive paradigm (Fuenmayor, 1991). A paradigm of inquiry that has emerged which embraces anti-functionalist views and which is grounded in qualitative methods is the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP). As the drive to gain insight into agency and structure began within this tradition it is to that body of scholars that we primarily target this paper. However, the principles outlined in the remainder of section may be applicable to a wider industrial marketing and indeed marketing audience, but to make such an argument is beyond the scope of a single article.

The product of the IMP has been substantially grounded in interpretive assumptions which disavow determinism (Easton, 2010) and which have enshrined agency at the heart of their theorizing (here we are defining prominent IMP scholars using the social network analysis of Henneberg et al. (2009), which provides positional information about key researchers in the field). Notably, Hakansson and Snehota (1998:20) observe that:

> "Relationships always have a time dimension and thus a future that is uncertain and a history whose interpretations and memories are subjective. Relationships are thus undetermined; their meaning to those involved is changing over time and their development depends on how the parties interpret and re-interpret different acts … Relationships are enacted, they become what the parties make them …"

Similarly, Ford and Hakansson (2006: 7) contend that "all interaction has specific meanings for those involved and for those affected by it. All subsequent interaction will be based on these interpretations of that meaning by all of those who are affected by it." A prominent voluntarist argument within the IMP is that there are grave difficulties associated with providing prescriptions for successful management action

to firms. Ford et al. (2003) argue that all of the firms in a network are pursuing their own goals, and that the outcome of any individual firm's actions will be affected by the actions of other network actors. Easton (2010: 118) indeed asserts that interpretivists "reject the possibility of discerning causality," and equally Baraldi et al. (2007: 890) argue that "such determinism [inherent in neoclassic theory] is anathema to most IMP scholars." Thus, by contraposing the American and IMP schools of thought, the dichotomy of functionalism and interpretivism can be illustrated at play in industrial marketing scholarship. Having identified this issue, we will attempt next to show that scholars associated with the IMP tradition have begun to engage with approaches capable to breaching this dichotomy.

Both structuration (see for instance Ellis & Mayer, 2001; Nicholson et al., 2009; Nicholson et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2009) and critical realism (see for instance Easton, 2010; Ehret, 2013; Harrison & Easton, 2002; Matthyssens et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2013a; Ryan et al., 2012) have seen limited, but increasing use in industrial marketing scholarship. It is clear that critical realism is gaining most traction, and our concern is that is that IM scholars choose one to the exclusion of the other when so much's stands to be gained by using both structuration and critical realism (and others), we will argue as part of a pluralism of pluralistic perspectives Critical realism and structuration were conceived by their founders (Bhaskar and Giddens) as stratified rather than flat ontologies with reality seen as recursive and emergent. Instead of visualizing a dualism between agency/structure and voluntarism/determinism, they encapsulate insight into both sides of these dichotomies and as such, these theoretical frameworks offer insight beyond those available through a functionalist or an interpretivist lens. Critical realism and structuration see reality as constructed by the interplay between agency and structure, therefore these approaches arguably also offer insight beyond the sum total of endeavours of functionalist and interpretivist researchers operating in their separate paradigms. Bhaskar and Giddens initially agreed that their work had many similarities and it was Archer's (1995) work on morphogenetics that has been credited with arguing for a key distinction between critical realism and structuration in the pre-existence of structure. Archer is one of several scholars who have further developed critical realism (others include Lawson, 2002; Norrie, 2010; Sayer, 2000); indeed a key distinction between critical realism and structuration is Bhaskar's continuing engagement with his ideas and these authors in developing his ideas). However we should acknowledge that structuration has also been developed by later authors (for instance DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Stones, 2005. Stones (2001) has actually argued against Archer's arguments for incompatibilities between structuration and critical realism, and such comparisons are ongoing. A case made in this paper is that industrial marketing scholars should continue to use both structuration and critical realism, and indeed explore similar 'other' frameworks that offer enhanced insight into agency and structure. However, we will next argue that to do so requires intellectual engagement with notions of pluralism. To advance this argument we turn to the work of another of the first of our three core authors, Midgley. We will return to several of the debates broached in the introduction throughout the remainder of the paper.
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Midgley's Critical pluralism

There would seem to be a fine line between pluralism and pragmatism. Indeed, Midgley, 1992:149 cautions as to the risks of "semitheoretical pragmatism". It seems apparent that a pursuit of pluralism needs some guiding principles. We here propose Midgely's notion of critical pluralism to be a significant aid in this respect. One of the principles Midgley advocates to avoid semitheoretical pragmatism is to define a clear purpose for pluralism. Whilst acknowledging the possible broader applicability of the arguments we present in this paper, we have limited discussion to increasing insight into agency and structure in industrial marketing research. We have further narrowed the scope to ground our argument within the IMP school of thought. We note first the comments of Midgley (2000: 251) who suggests that:-

> "For paradigms to change, it must be possible for individual agents to propose new ideas that step outside old paradigmatic assumptions. The question is, what kind of 'paradigm' exists when an individual breaks the paradigmatic mould."

It seems apparent that IMP scholars have in the past broken with the paradigmatic assumptions of the dominant functionalist paradigm, and again in favouring critical realism, seem again more recently to be breaking with the interpretivist assumptions of the IMP and its Interaction and Networks Perspective (INWP). It seems therefore that twice, IMP scholars have stepped outside old paradigmatic assumptions; therefore it is questionable that a crenellated paradigm truly existed. What is instead discernable is perhaps an inherent sense of pluralism within the IMP. Use of critical realism does seem like a continuation of this movement, in that it avoids the aspects of the incommensurability thesis which if accepted, divides insight into agency and structure into two atomistic paradigms. However, critical realism has also often been asserted by some IMP scholars to act above or between paradigms, existing as *the* meta-theory and appearing very much like the sole route to expose interplay between agency and structure. In this sense critical realism begins to sound very much like a *new* paradigm, whereas it is advocated by some as a means of creating interplay *between* paradigms. This situation seems intellectually unsatisfactory and we will propose that Midgley's notion of critical pluralism may provide a compass to further guide the inherently pluralistic intent within the IMP.

It is probable that one incentive for grounding findings under the umbrella of a meta-theory is to enhance the empirical robustness. Marketing has indeed been accused of being theory weak (Burton, 2005; Hunt, 1994; Troye and Howell, 2004; Yadav, 2010). Unsurprisingly, therefore, there have been many calls for marketing scholars to strengthen the philosophical foundations of their theories (Peters et al., 2013b; Tadajewski, 2008). One solution that has been advanced in industrial marketing is a focus on mid-range theories (Brodie et al., 2011; Möller, 2013; Järvensivu and Möller, 2009; Woodside, 2003)[1]- theories that explain a sub-set of phenomenon but which form a link between general theories and empirical contributions. However, a particular weakness in mid-range theories is their inability to deal adequately with the competing theoretical assumptions of agency and structure, voluntarism and determinism (Ehret, 2013). Mid-range theories are therefore limited in their potential to account for the complex interplay between agency and structure. Whilst we

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[1] See also work outwith the discipline of marketing; Weick K.E. (1974), Pinder C.C. and Moore L.F. (1979), Bourgeois III L.J. (1979), and Eisenhardt K.M. and Bourgeois III L.J. (1988).

strongly agree that critical realism has the potential to enhance insights into industrial and network interactions beyond that achievable within the constraints of dominant paradigms, we take issue with a number of marketing scholars who in rejecting the incommensurability thesis advocate intellectual engagement with concepts such as metatriangulation (Matthyssens et al., 2013) or multi-paradigm operations (Davies & Fitchett, 2005; Lowe et al., 2004). A central problem that we highlight in this paper is that there remain intellectual problems with asserting the hierarchical primacy (including existence at a meta-level) of methods, methodologies or theories. In this paper we introduce Midgley's notion of critical pluralism to industrial marketing debate and argue that this notion of critical plurality should negate hierarchical imperatives in research design. The key element of his position is the need to avoid advocacy of a single general theory, proposing a position that detaches methodology from methods and offers researchers to take a stance that each new combination of techniques and theoretical perspectives opens up a new position is a spectrum of possibilities that includes the positions occupied by established paradigms. This perspective may be one way of confronting the concerns expressed by several IM scholars, for instance Woodside and Baxter (2013: 382) when they state:

> "Different general level theories, whether scholars use them individually or in blended forms that incorporate more than one theory or paradigm, can potentially inform marketing research in different ways. However, ontological and epistemological tensions may occur in adopting theories, particularly when they embrace a wide range of paradigms."

Seemingly alert to these types of concerns, Midgley (2000: 248) comments that:

> "There is no need to claim that we are operating across paradigms – we just have to acknowledge that we are setting up a new position which encourages learning about ideas from other paradigms, but reinterpreted in our own terms."

The intellectual acceptance of Midgley's argument would seem to negate the need to claim inter-paradigm operation, and it could also allow researchers to side-step claims of meta-paradigmatic operation. We feel this notion of critical pluralism will allow industrial marketing scholars to break out of some aspects of the incommensurability embranglement by arguing that they are operating in new theoretical positions. However, we also seek further to deploy Midgley's critical plurality to avoid the establishment of a new 'paradigm' of critical realism which becomes the sole means of gaining insight into agency and structure in industrial marketing thought. To do so, we will next explore an argument for critical plurality in three dimensions, theoretical, methodological and methodical and we move to present the central contribution of our paper, a three dimensional decision framework. The framework therefore offers recognition that ontological and epistemological considerations must be contextualised at moments in an inquiry and that incommensurability should be tackled not just at a single meta-level (which we refer to instead as a dimension). This approach, while not resolving the incommensurability debate, offers an approach that increases the potential for commensurability.

Implementing three dimensional pluralism?

Our aim is to present discussion concerning how critical pluralism can be implemented at each dimension. In proposing such a framework, the authors are heavily indebted to the contribution of Easton (1995; 1998; 2002; 2010) to the discussion of theoretical, methodological and methodical approaches to researching industrial marketing phenomena. Easton's (1995) three dimensional framework forms the foundation for what follows in the remainder of the paper. Midgley (2000) argues that many of the terms discussed in this paper imply hierarchical connotations because of the conventional view in the philosophy of science that methods embody methodological assumptions, methodologies embody theoretical ones and theories embody philosophical assumptions. Thus, a prevailing view in social sciences is that because everything else flows from these, the priority is to first get the philosophy, and then the subsequent theory, right. Following Easton (1995), a non-hierarchical perspective is advocated here in which theory (including philosophy), methodologies and methods are seen as three dimensions (rather than levels) of an intellectual position. Midgley (2000) argues that it is equally as possible for insights from methodological development and practice to raise questions for philosophy and theory as it is for learning to move in the other direction, hence the conventional hierarchy is undermined. Such a three-dimensional "vision of inquiry" (Midgley, 1992:169) is illustrated in Fig. 1 and includes a central decision area at the intersection of the three dimensions that negates hierarchical imperatives. Each dimension is addressed in turn in the following sections.
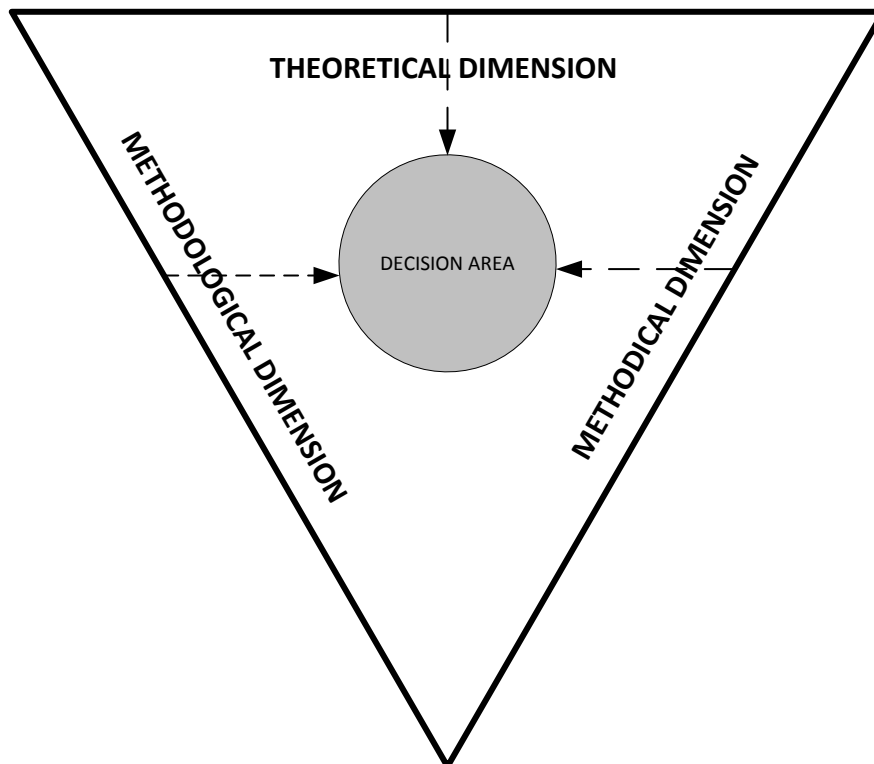
Fig. 1: A vision of three dimensional pluralism

We take each dimension of Fig. 1 in turn in the following sections.

The theoretical dimension

Marketers have been for many years engaged in an attempt to unify the field of marketing under a single general theory of marketing (see for instance Ringold & Weitz, 2007; Hunt, 1983; Bartels, 1951; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Hunt, 2013). However, conversely we also note suggestions that industrial marketers must call on a broad range of both epistemologies and methods (Woodside & Baxter, 2013; Nicholson et al., 2009) to explain industrial marketing phenomena. This plurality is we argue, difficult to achieve under a single general theory. Möller (2013: 325) highlights further problems when attempting to propose a single general theory when stating:

> "There are several open issues in this commendable endeavour. For example, to what extent can the 'root' approaches of the new general theory be integrated? This is a moot point, which depends on the relative commensurability of metatheoretical assumptions concerning the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of the root theories."

Hence to counter the validity of a debate for a single general theory and advance a case for critical pluralism it is necessary to engage with both the notions of incommensurability and metatheoretical assumptions, which we will next attempt to do.

The term 'paradigm' is polysemic. One meaning is a "world view in any particular field" (Creswell, 1998: 74), like viewing the world through a particular instrument, such as an "x-ray machine or microscope" (Mingers, 1997: 9). As a researcher, being located in a 'paradigm' in this sense involves making ontological and epistemological assumptions (Schultz & Hatch, 1996; Lowe et al., 2005) about the existence of the world and human knowledge, which can be contrasted with the assumptions made by people in different paradigms. As discussed earlier, historically pertinent examples in respect of this paper are the functionalist and interpretivist paradigms (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Another meaning of the term 'paradigm', however, is methodological/procedural: for instance, quantitative and qualitative 'paradigms' are often discussed (but these methodological practices have been argued to associate very strongly with the functionalist and interpretivist paradigms (Deshpande, 1983)). The problem of paradigms is the antithetical position they can occupy in contrast to a pluralistic intent. Paradigm incommensurability has been discussed in a seminal contribution by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and is supported in much later work (Jackson & Carter, 1991, 1993). However, the extent to which the paradigms are really mutually exclusive has been the subject of much debate (see for instance De Cock & Jeanes, 2006; Tadajewski, 2009; Willmott, 1993). Although there are clearly theories that have been successfully developed through cross-paradigm learning, those that claim to be 'metaparadigmatic' (transcending and thereby uniting several paradigms) have been subject to criticisms on the grounds that they introduce new assumptions with which the proponents of the original paradigms being 'integrated' would not agree with (Gregory, 1992; Tsoukas, 1993; Midgley, 1989; Möller, 2013). Peters et al. (2013a: 337) further note that:

> "…attempting to overcome incommensurability by forming teams of researchers from differing paradigms who try together to construct one

explanation of the data is inherently problematic, as inevitably one or more researchers will be forced to abandon their ontological position."

Metatheory is a term that has appeared in several industrial marketing papers (Houman Andersen & Kragh, 2010; Järvensivu & Möller, 2009; Sousa, 2010; Matthyssens et al., 2013). Midgley (2000) argues that the kinds of 'metatheories' are not metaparadigmatic, in that they exist at the same level as the paradigms they are seeking to integrate, and they compete with them. Essentially, he proposes that claims that paradigms can be integrated in this way lack credibility, and suggests that an argument that each new three dimensional combination creates a legitimate new position in a range possibilities. Weaver and Gioia (1994:565) summarized incommensurability in the following way: "representatives of opposed paradigms live in different worlds, hold mutually exclusive beliefs, and use different vocabularies". We argue that such beliefs and language denote the enactment of paradigms by researchers, rather than factors inherent in the philosophical make up of the paradigm but which can be breached with intentional action (we have earlier contended IMP scholars have done at least twice). We propose that such intentional action should include accepting that they are operating in a new theoretical position and next isolate how researchers in such a position should see the interplay between agency and structure.

Parallel and analogous to the agency/structure dichotomy is the dichotomy between structurally constrained determinism and agency empowered voluntarism. Whittington (1988) described strategic determinism as having two fundamental forms: environmental and action determinism. First, under environmental determinism, options are limited by the possibility that only one option will lead to survival in certain external environmental conditions, while the other options will result in extinction. Typically, cause and effect relationships between actors and external determinants have been exposed in quantitative variance theories (Lewis and Suchan, 2003; Markus & Robey, 1988; Langley, 1999) espoused in the majority of industrial marketing papers. In a second form of determinism, action determinism, the environment is of secondary importance: outcomes are instead determined by the constitution and in-built preferences of the actors themselves. Such in-built preferences are knowledge-based and can be as causal as an environmental structure. Voluntarism (Child, 1997), later termed interpretive voluntarism (Pozzebon, 2004; Whittington, 1988) on the other hand, assumes the free choice and volition of conscious human agents in their environments. Whittington argues that while voluntarist assumptions remove the environmental constraint in favour of agency, they also dissolve the pre-conditions for action. Such preconditions may exist in the constitution of agents, such as in action determinism. Although certain aspects of social phenomena may have no objective existence, "if people behave as though they do exist […] then the effect is as though those social phenomena do, in fact, exist" (Brennan, 2006: 831). Actions may therefore contain a conditioned reaction in response to things that are socially real, but which may not exist in any concrete sense as in the functionalist paradigm (Fleetwood, 2005; Riley, 1983). Where a structure is intangible, its existence may only be detectable through having "causal efficacy" (Mingers, 2004: 409); essentially a reaction to something that is discernable only through its effect. Such social structures can cause a soft form of determinism (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994) grounded in the knowledgeability of actors; examples include cultural schemas, world-views or rules inherent in a role, rank or position

(Stones, 2005). Makkonen et al. (2012: 289-290) argue that "events comprising human action alone are close to the concept of activity" in terms of the IMP's AAR model- essentially affirming the voluntarist emphasis of much industrial networks research, whereas "action in time and place" consists of an actors' "conscious and unconscious subjective purposes and perspectives."

In an attempt to move further beyond atomistic 'either/or' decisions in respect of agency/structure and voluntarism/determinism in a way that acknowledges the importance of an actor's knowledgeability, Whittington (1992) positions critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978; 1979) as an attempt to break out of the dilemma. Whittington (1988: 528) proposed that critical realism recognizes:

> "…both structure and agency in the explanation of human activity. Structure is not atomized, as in action determinism; nor does it crush human agency, as in environmental determinism; nor finally is it subordinate and fused continually in events as interpretive voluntarists assume".

Unlike interpretive voluntarism, critical realism accepts the existence of structures; but, unlike determinism, it sees these structures as 'facilitating' as well as constraining agency. Pozzebon (2004) later proposed a modification to concepts introduced by Whittington discussing integrative approaches rather than realist sociology (critical realism). Fig. 2 brings together the original work of Whittington with the development of the ideas by Pozzebon and includes the authors conjectural positioning of the IMP tradition.
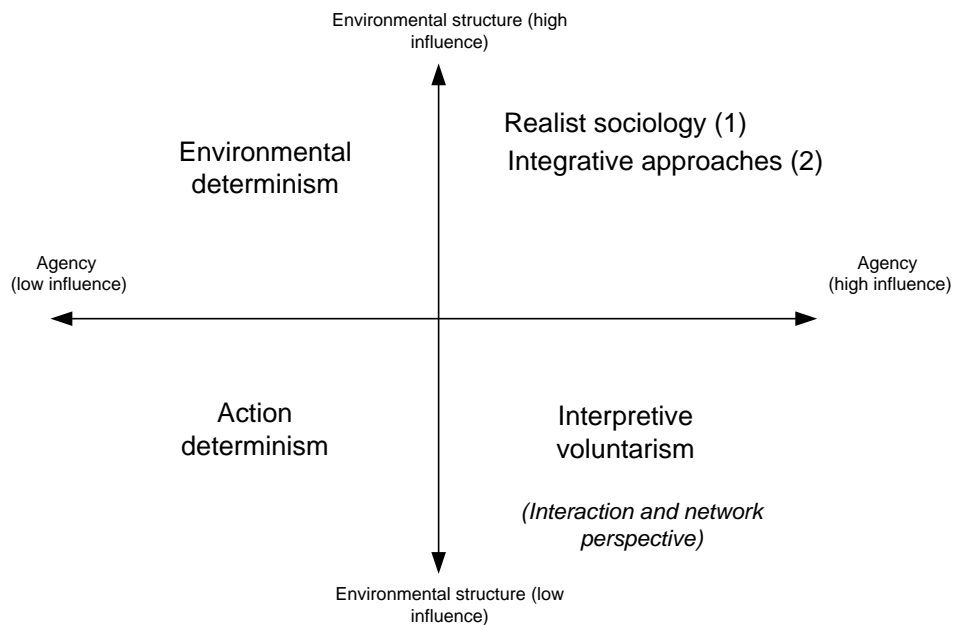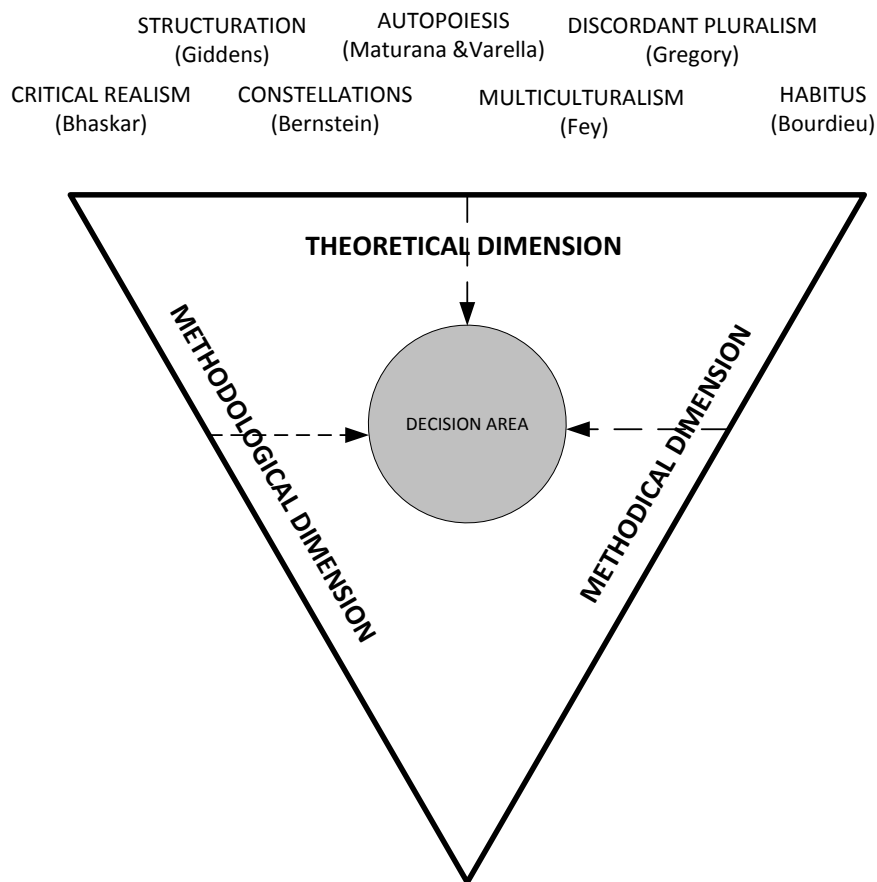

Fig 2: The relative emphasis of agency and structure in theory development
Original model by Whittington (1988) with top right-hand quadrant showing the original naming (1) by Whittington (1988: 524), and later renaming (2) by Pozzebon (2004: 265).

The critical realist position is increasingly being embraced by IMP scholars, however, Ryan et al. (2012: 309) seem to appreciate Pozzebon's position when they note that:

> "We neither assume that critical realism is the only choice available to business relationship and network researchers nor that it is without its critics."

Offering pertinent choices, Pozzebon (2004: 265) argued that critical realism is one of a number of 'integrative approaches'; theories that "take into account both dimensions – structure and agency – thereby avoiding a dichotomist view and moving toward a more holistic understanding of human choice". In other words, use of an integrative approach demonstrates intent to break out of the voluntarist/determinist and interpretivist/functionalist dichotomies. Critical realism is therefore one example of an integrative approach alongside other posited integrative approaches (Pozzebon, 2004; Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005; Pozzebon et al., 2009): Fay's multiculturalism (1996); Bernstein's (1983; 1991) work on overcoming the objectivity/subjectivity dichotomy by thinking in terms of 'constellations'; Bourdieu's (1990) habitus and Giddens' (1984) structuration. Further promising integrative approaches from the domain of systems thinking are here introduced: the theory of autopoiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1992; Mingers, 1996), and discordant pluralism (Gregory, 1996); undoubtedly others exist. We illustrate the position of these options in our three dimensional vision of inquiry (Fig. 3).

STRUCTURATION
(Giddens)

AUTOPOIESIS
(Maturana &Varella)

DISCORDANT PLURALISM
(Gregory)

CRITICAL REALISM
(Bhaskar)

CONSTELLATIONS
(Bernstein)

MULTICULTURALISM
(Fey)

HABITUS
(Bourdieu)

THEORETICAL DIMENSION

METHODOLOGICAL DIMENSION

METHODICAL DIMENSION

DECISION AREA

Fig. 3 A vision of three dimensional pluralism showing choices of integrative theories at theoretical dimension

Because any integrative approach operates at the same level as recognised paradigms (and is therefore not metaparadigmatic), it follows that there can be 'multiple' integrative theories (as illustrated in Fig. 3). Indeed, if one accepts Midgley's (2000) critical pluralist argument, an integrative theory can sit comfortably alongside any other general theory, integrative or otherwise. In declaring that it is possible to have multiple integrative theories, the authors declare a disagreement with several authors who have rejected the possibility of metatheoretical plurality (De Cock and Rickards, 1995; Weaver and Gioia, 1995). However, such a disagreement is grounded in a rejection of the very notion of metatheory. Instead, the paper follows the logic of Midgley (2000) who argued that plurality can be embraced on both the theoretical and methodological dimensions. Theoretical pluralism (and with it, acceptance of multiple integrative theories) is possible because of the observation that different theories assume different boundaries, or frames, for analysis. Agents can explore different possible boundaries and choose between them in the local contexts of their research, and the exploration and choice of theories (including integrative theories) follows from this. Importantly, Midgley's (2000: 159) perspective does not imply absolute relativism: it is still possible to have "principles and standards for choice, albeit standards that are locally and temporally relevant rather than universal". His notion of theoretical pluralism within locally and temporally relevant boundaries involves an acceptance that it is naïve to assert the possibility of a godlike theory of everything, a unifying grand theory or single paradigm under which all other methodological perspectives can be suborned; in other words equally as with functionalism and interpretivism, an integrative theory should never be granted a universal or absolute status, placed beyond critique (Midgley, 2011). Such absolute status in respect of the potential of critical pluralism to capture the interplay between agency and structure is a risk we perceive in respect of the burgeoning interest in critical realism amongst IM scholars. An integrative theory intentionally reconstructs some of the key assumptions of the functionalist and interpretive paradigms. There will therefore inevitably be elements that people wedded to the functionalist or interpretive paradigms will not be able to accept. Thus, no single integrative theory will convince passionate functionalists or interpretivists to widen their horizons, and indeed there is no need to win such an argument for the aims of this paper to be achieved. Nevertheless, an argument will be advanced for the advantages of an integrative theory against the advocates of these two specific paradigms, their underlying assumptions and thus the marketing schools of thought built around them. However, use of an integrative theory does not amount to an attempt to sweep away these paradigms in a quest for homogeneity (a concern of Jackson & Carter, 1991).

Its is possible therefore to argue from a critical pluralist mantle that a plurality of pluralistic perspectives is available to an industrial marketing scholar, albeit one must be chosen within the boundaries of a single research problem. Through this approach, a range of theoretical perspectives capable of gaining insight into agency and structure are available. One such perspective is selected within each research design, but plurality between different pieces of research is achievable and offers the potential for revelatory insight into industrial marketing phenomenon.
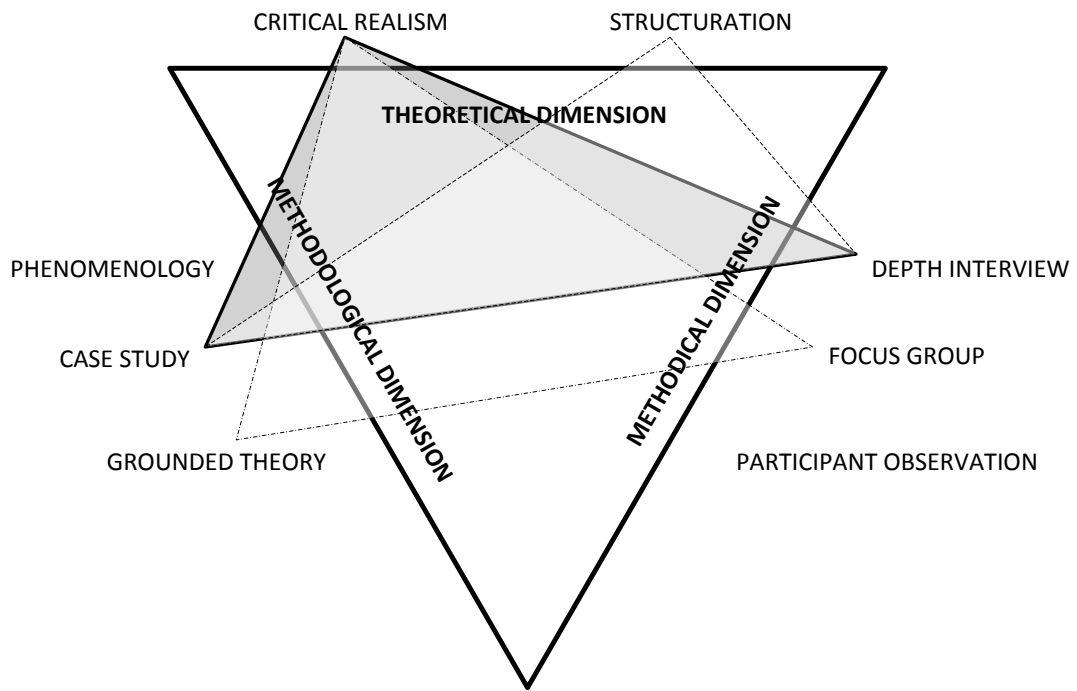
The methodological dimension.

Methodological pluralism is often discussed within marketing papers as the deployment of multiple methods of inquiry. A distinction is made in this paper

between methodologies and methods. While the boundary between the two is seldom distinct, following Checkland (1981) and Midgley (2000: 105) we propose that methods are a "set of techniques operated to achieve a given purpose", and a methodology a "set of theoretical ideas that justifies the use of a particular method or methods." Easton (1995) similarly proposed that methodological and methodical (procedural) dimensions exist in additional to a theoretical dimension so Midgley's and Easton's arguments seem complementary. Methodologies according to this distinction should contain some theoretical content, such as survey techniques being associated with the functionalist paradigm. Case study methodologies have often lacked explicit links to theoretical level considerations, many contributions derived from them therefore being at the mid-range of theory. A further problem that we perceive in IM scholarship is the entrenched practice between methodology and methods, for instance survey methodologies linked to questionnaires, and case studies linked to interviews. An unwillingness for researchers in a methodological tradition to decouple a methodology from a tried and tested set of methods has been discussed as isolationist (Jackson, 1987). The movement towards critical realism (or structuration) by industrial marketers is a welcome attempt to break out from some of the constraints of theoretical dimension incommensurability that leaves voluntarism and determinism as the concerns of different research paradigms. However, we have argued that a critical pluralist approach allows for the use of other integrative techniques, each which may create a new position at a theoretical dimension, and each of which is also capable of breaching such perceived incommensurability. Coupling critical realism with a case study methodology does indeed make subsequent theoretical contributions more philosophically robust; however, there is a danger that if critical realism is uncritically wedded to a case study methodology (a trend that seems to be emerging) then greater opportunities for insight into agency and structure are missed. Midgley (2000: 172) talked of methodological pluralism as:

> "…embracing the possibility of engagement at two levels [dimensions]: at the levels of methodology, where we can respect others' methodological ideas, thereby allowing their insights to inform our own methodology […] and method, where we can use a wide range of methods in support of particular purposes".

If the phenomenon to which this paper is addressed is defined as a quest for insight into agency and structure, rather than the promotion of critical realism, there would seem greater value in investigating industrial marketing phenomena using multiple integrative theories, multiple methodologies and multiple methods. The opportunity presented here is therefore for the potential of revelatory insight into agency and structure. However, Hunt (1994) talks of critical pluralism rather than a naïve pluralism - to assert that all things should be considered pluralistically is as naïve as to assert and defend theoretical incommensurability and methodological isolationism. Methodical (procedural) considerations must be those that are capable of gaining insight into time and space. Hence, methodical dimension considerations must be those that achieve that aim.

Fig 4: Three dimensional pluralism: Methodological dimension choices

Fig. 4 offers a conjectural representation of theoretical and methodological and methodical plurality available to industrial marketers. The dark shaded triangle offers a view of the dominant approach in the IMP; a combination of critical realism, case-studies and depth interviewing. Theoretical plurality is achieved through a pluralism of pluralistic perspectives, and methodological pluralism is achievable by decoupling a preferred methodological tradition (such as case-studies) from theoretical level choices. In Fig. 4 we offer two (of many) alternative scenarios, an option to continue using critical realism but with, grounded theory (methodological dimension) and focus groups (methodical dimension). The third illustrated alternative would be to keep the case study-interview combination but instead use structuration at a theoretical dimension. However, what remains is to elaborate on how practical empirical findings can be derived that allow the development of process theories containing explicit and distinctive exposition of agency and structure.

The methodical (procedural) dimension.

The instigation of critical pluralism at a methodical/procedural dimension could be interpreted as the use of mixed methods of data collection (see for instance Creswell, 2013; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003), and indeed such an attempt at methodical pluralism should be encouraged. However, since the focus of this paper is in respect of gaining insight into agency and structure, there are certain specific procedural elements that have particular pertinence to gaining insight into agency and structure, and we focus solely on these for the remainder of this section. For the aims of critical pluralism to be achieved, the interplay between agency and structure over time and space must be revealed in the subsequent built theory. The conceptualization of time in process theories has received notable attention from industrial marketing theorists

(for instance Araujo & Easton, 2012; Halinen et al., 2012; Medlin, 2004) and the development of insight into agency and structure across time and space would seem a logical extension of this work. However, there are well regarded problems with the notion of pairing integrative theories with appropriate methods (rather than methodologies, which necessarily have an explicitly theoretical aspect) that have yet to be fully explored in industrial marketing scholarship (Ryan et al., 2012). We propose that there are three dimensions to the solution 1) data types, 2) theorizing strategy and 3) built theory type.

Data type. Three key elements of data potentiality can be identified that affect such a theorizing process; time and space, agency and structure and an actors' knowledgability (Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005). Different depths of analysis in respect of opening up insight into time and space can be applied in respect of three types of data; longitudinal (qualitative or quantitative) collected by measuring variances at set intervals; longitudinal (qualitative) with, diachronic potential and finally, retrospective (qualitative) with diachronic potential.

Longitudinal, in contrast to cross-sectional, emerges as yet another unhelpful dichotomy where pluralistic thinking would be beneficial. While longitudinal research might appear outwardly utopian when developing process theory, in itself, it does not necessarily deliver 'evolutionary' process theory. Barley (1990: 224) argued that an "evolutionary perspective is especially important if one wishes to analyze transformations of action rather than merely identify and examine historical trends". Hence if we are to examine the interplay between agency and structure in time and space then the process theories that arise should ideally be diachronic in character. Barley (1990) refers to diachronic study as distinctive from longitudinal in its evolutionary, and therefore processual and dynamic, potential. Thus, diachronic process theories best expose the impact of time 'on' interaction, rather than simply revealing interaction 'over' time. Qualitative retrospective accounts, reports and event histories are appropriate methods of reconstructing the past (Golden, 1992; Golden, 1997; Miller et al., 1997; Bizzi & Langley, 2012). Access to an actor's practical consciousness is achievable through retrospective accounts. Conscious recall is therefore only a partial requirement. Accessing the practical knowledgeability of actors is an opportunity to better develop diachronic process based theories that contain explicit and distinct notions of agency and structure. Whether data collection is longitudinal or retrospective is of less significance than the effectiveness of the theorizing process that exposes the preconditions for action contained in the knowledge of actors. The impact of time 'on' process (diachronicity) can therefore be revealed using qualitative approaches. However, quantitative approaches may also be appropriately used longitudinally to reveal change 'over' time.

Theorizing processes. The theorizing process becomes of distinct procedural importance in identifying preconditions in historical knowledge when using an integrative theory. Due to their virtual existence, some structures may only become evident during theory building, not just due to appropriate coding procedures. Strategies for theory building are not often discussed within industrial marketing literature and have not yet received significant discussion within critical realist papers or in those deploying structuration. Strategies for theorizing from process data (Langley, 1999) and further strategies involving one such integrative theory, structuration, (Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005), have been discussed and

implemented particularly well within the IT discipline to produce empirical papers (Jones & Karsten, 2008; Pozzebon et al., 2009; Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005) and have recently been advocated in respect of research into industrial networks (Bizzi & Langley, 2012; Makkonen et al., 2012). Pozzebon and Pinsonneault helpfully discuss a series of non-mutually exclusive theorizing approaches that can be deployed, each of which expose time and space, the duality of agency and structure, and an actor's knowledgeability to different degrees. There would seem to be opportunity to develop a pluralism of different theoretical perspectives, methodologies and procedures within the industrial marketing discipline.

Pozzebon and Pinsonneault (2005) proposed that a first stage of developing theory from deployment of an integrative theory is Langley's grounded approach. A grounded approach is an inductive phase underpinning all other theorizing strategies. During this process, data can be coalesced into codes and emergent themes identified. A researcher can then deploy one of two organizing strategies: a narrative strategy, or a visual process map. In a narrative strategy, stories, meanings, and mechanisms can be deployed as an initial step in order to explain the emergence of the constructs over the phases of the fieldwork, as an intermediate step, or as the main product of the research. Visual mapping involves the abstraction of more general concepts than is achievable in a grounded strategy. Finally, they propose two forms of temporal bracketing, 'fine grained' and 'broad ranging.' These processes involve bracketing the interplay between agency and structure into episodes. Fine grained and broad ranging bracketing can be differentiated by the length of the time-periods within which the episodes are demonstrated with less well defined temporal boundaries (for full explanations of these strategies see by Langley (1999) and Pozzebon and Pinsonneault (2005). These strategies hold possibilities for the exposition of agency and structure using either qualitative or quantitative methdological traditions.

Pozzebon and Pinsonneault advocate grounded and narrative strategies as effective in gaining access to the duality of agency and structure across time and space and for accessing an actor's knowledgeability, with visual mapping and temporal bracketing less effective for gaining access to an actor's knowledgeability. Access to an actor's knowledgeability is demanded to build diachronic theories from both longitudinal and retrospective data. Which theorizing process is appropriate is therefore closely associated with the type of data collected.

Built theory types: The product of a theorizing process has been classified into four types of process theory: lifecycle, teleological, dialectic and evolutionary (Van de Ven, 1992; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Each model has a starting point, an end point, and has an emergent process. Life-cycle models have received the most significant attention within industrial marketing scholarship (cf Dwyer et al., 1987; Eggert et al., 2006; Ford, 1980). In lifecycle models, the "trajectory to the end state is prefigured, and requires a specific historical sequence of events" (Van de Ven, 1992: 177). Life-cycle models are sufficient for revealing interaction over time but seem limited in their diachronic potential (Medlin, 2004). More recently, Peters et al. (2012) suggest that a more promising type of theory for diachronic insight is a teleological process theory. Teleological and lifecycle theories have predicated start and end points, but differ in that teleological process theories do not predict the intermediate process of change. Notions of equifinality therefore underpin teleological

process theories; different paths can be trodden to reach the same objective (Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Arguably, some business relationships move from fixed and identifiable starting points to objectified end states, and in such circumstances, episodal research strategies (Schurr, 2004; 2007) may be appropriate to produce lifecycle or teleological process theories underpinned by temporal bracketing theorizing strategies. Such a strategy would involve bracketing the interplay between agency and structure into episodes. With fine grained temporal bracketing, the impact of changes in structure on action over shorter periods, or changes in action on structure, can be mapped. However, over short periods, episodal boundaries would need to be clearly definable. Both lifecycle and diachronic models could be built using an episodal bracketing strategy. A quantitative approach would reveal time and space, agency and structure. An advantage of these strategies is the ability to present a lot of data in a limited space, addressing concerns that process theories are difficult to publish due to journalistic word-limits (Eisenhardt, 1991; Sminia, 2009). However, to gain access to an actor's knowledgably, and therefore build diachronic process theory, qualitative data would seem to be demanded.

The enactment of critical pluralism as a methodical level we therefore propose includes developing a body of work using mixed methods of inquiry. However, of equal importance is that researcher state their approach in respect of data type, theorizing strategy and built theory type. These three elements determine the methods used to explicitly expose the interplay between agency and structure, thus achieving critical plurality.

Conclusion and contributions

A central contention in this paper was that a quest for greater insight into agency and structure in industrial marketing scholarship should embrace critical pluralism (which includes critical realism as one of a number of integrative perspectives) rather than seeing critical realism as the be-all end-all solution to this ambition. Indeed, a parallel body of work embracing structuration theory is already emerging which seems to have similar ambitions to papers deploying critical realism. Yet there are others integrative perspectives that have yet to be explored by IM scholars. A concern was to develop a framework that enhanced the potential for insight into agency and structure in industrial marketing scholarship. Taking a lead from Easton, we have advocated consideration of critical plurality in three dimensions, rather than levels. The advantage here is not to be lead by either a bottom up or top down logic. Instead we see illustrate a vision of inquiry in which the decision area (see Figs. 1 & 3) is an intersection of three dimensions, of which any one can lead. However, the framework we have proposed follows Easton's (1995: 412) logic that such a framework "is meant to be neither normative nor positive but illuminative". Our proposed framework is therefore designed to illuminate the steps through which theorizing can be developed. We contend that approaching commensurability in three dimensions offers greater opportunities for insight into agency and structure than discussing such matters at purely an ontological level (the primary domain of the paradigm wars). The greater potential for revelatory insight into networks and business interaction we propose would come by embracing the full plurality and diversity offered by considering a

vision of inquiry in three dimensions. We have attempted to provide a vision of such a three dimensional plurality in Fig.4.

A further concern of the authors was that a proposed solution must allow for a more robust defence against marketing being theory weak to be made. Attempts to define a single general theory or metatheory have bedevilled marketing scholarship for decades. An approach accepting Midgley's notion of critical pluralism allows for choices to be made within contextually relevant boundaries, incorporating theoretical level considerations without needed to justify findings against a single grand theory. Ryan et al. (2012) point to the tendency of authors of CR papers to state procedural matters and ignore philosophical level issues – we propose that space constraints in journal articles are one probable cause of this. Their paper provides a valuable referential base point within IM, which can be referenced for CR researchers and thus avoiding lengthy methodological and philosophical arguments in every paper that will inevitably drive reviewers to distraction. Indeed, the value of such conceptual base point can be identified in the IT discipline where early conceptual discussion of adaptive structuration theory (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Walsham & Han, 1991) led later to a substantial body of empirical papers in IT, and attracted attention from scholars outside the discipline (evidenced indeed by their reference here). We hope in this paper to have provided a similar base point for researchers using a multiplicity of integrative perspectives. Through the approach outlined in this paper, we feel the potential for indigenous theory development is enhanced. It is possible therefore to conceive of a research endeavour within IMP that is both capable of theoretical rigour whilst being practically useful. The endeavour would be capable of gaining insight into the interplay between agency and structure in IM interaction that would be seen through multiple theoretical, methodological and methodical lenses. The potential for such an approach to expand beyond the boundaries of IM seems high.

In this paper, building on work by Pozzebon, we have developed a notion of a pluralism of pluralistic perspectives, multiple integrative perspectives, each capable of coping with interplay between agency and structure (wee illustrate these possibilities in Fig 3). Our purpose in exploring critical pluralism was indeed to seek greater insight into agency and structure in industrial marketing research. Central in making this argument is the avoidance of paradigm embranglement's and indeed a core concern stated at the head of the paper was that IM scholars should not look to develop a third competing critical realist paradigm between the functionalist and interpretivist paradigms. Instead, we have proposed that a pluralistic approach offers multiple three dimensional visions of inquiry, using a pluralism of pluralistic perspectives at the theoretical dimension. Through this approach a deeper insight into the interplay between agency and structure in IM can be obtained.

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