A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH TO NEW WAYS OF SEEING MARKETING IN SMEs: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

There is myriad research that explores the nature of marketing generally, and more specifically within SME (small to medium sized enterprise) contexts. Most of this research, however, focuses upon orthodox and relational marketing. Recently, it has also been argued that the literature fails to pay adequate attention to the role that critical studies might take in helping to understand marketing. Moreover, qualitative approaches to researching SME marketing have recently gained favour. This thesis takes the opportunity to employ a qualitative approach to researching SME marketing while at the same time exploring the implications for education, training and development (ETD).

This research explored how the subjective individual can make sense of particular social arenas. Adopting a social constructivist approach involving the researcher and participants, this research offers some clarity to the SME marketing ETD context. To illuminate new ways of seeing, this research looked to both SME and ETD participants to be part of a study located in the North East of England. The study employed a semi-structured interview that, when transcribed, provided research texts that were then analysed through a Discourse Analysis lens. This allowed discourses to emerge from the texts that illuminated aspects of marketing in a SME context, as well as aspects of ETD.

It is clear from the research that the extant nature of orthodox marketing’s central model, known as the 4Ps, is for the SME participants obvious and in the background. For the ETD participants this model is still central to how they see marketing ETD for SMEs in their role as educators, trainers and developers. However both SME and ETD perspectives include relational components, particularly networking. Critical components, in the light of Critical Theory and the turbulent business environment, can also be seen in the discourses of this thesis. The standpoints that the participants of this study combine, adapt, juxtapose or shape to fit conditions to their everyday lives, were exposed. The research texts contain metaphoric and other references that negotiate key tensions leading to confrontation and resistance to the dominant orthodox marketing form. This thesis explores the ways that participants use marketing-related discourse to inscribe their behaviours in a complex ideological system, immersed in social worlds.

Marketing realities are found to be more critical than at first assumed. A schema is developed that portrays the relationships between these actors and this social arena. I therefore assess themes that emerge from the narratives of participants and within each theme discourses are used to describe participants’ world views. This thesis provides a new way of seeing marketing and develops the relational, orthodox and critical (ROC) schema of SME marketing, applied to ETD. This schema informs thinking on a range of issues such as flows of information, relationships, network coordination and specific competencies. The schema should be considered carefully before the design and delivery of any form of SME marketing ETD programme and any materials are devised. The findings of this thesis suggest that the ROC schema is potentially applicable to other marketing contexts.

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In memory of my much loved parents George Arthur and Alice Maud Copley.

AUTHOR’S DECLARATION

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

The word count is 103003 words.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Origins of the thesis

This thesis has its origins in my 20-plus years of dealing with issues in marketing education and training and development (ETD) of SME owners and managers. I have also investigated other marketing contexts, especially those of arts and arts tourism managers, humanitarian causes, and the Arab management context. Further, the business environment has changed in many ways with issues such as Internet access or the increased possibilities with, for example, sponsorship, data base marketing or sales promotions having changed. This reflects the accepted need for refinement of marketing techniques, as with any organisation, over time. However, the argument in this thesis is that there is a requirement for more than mere refinement. For a time it appeared to me that educators and trainers were pushing the idea of a modernist, strategic outlook whilst the SME owner-manager remained short term, tactical and opportunistic in orientation. It then became clearer that relational marketing played a major part in both ETD work and SME owner-managers' business lives.

Earlier work

A study that led to an award of Master of Philosophy (Newcastle University, 1989) prompted me to conclude that epistemological and ontological concerns in the area of marketing and SMEs were justified and marketing thought had to go beyond the established norm. Certainly, relationship marketing, postmodernism and Critical Theory were interesting, identifiable directions. Extensive reading of the literature in this and other marketing contexts then led to the discovery that many issues were still unresolved and unattended and interest in marketing contexts thus grew.

Further context

Having considered the landscape, a further context for the focus of this thesis became marketing and product-based SMEs with the intention to critically examine SME marketing ETD and apply this in an empirical study. This research draws on the literature from the dominant orthodox discourse (modernist marketing), on relationship marketing, on postmodern marketing, on Critical Theory and on contemporary work in the SME marketing and ETD fields in order to develop an intellectual schema. The research constitutes a distinctive contribution to this area of study through application to a particular context, which approaches the problems of marketing from a new, original perspective and is very different from that of the orthodox, commonly taken view of marketing in the SME context.

Aim, the research question and objectives

Aim of the thesis

The aim of the thesis is, therefore, to provide an original contribution through a schema of marketing within the SME field that is a new way of seeing marketing, that is distinctly different to the orthodox discourse developed in much larger corporations over time. In this sense the aim is to contribute to the emerging set of concepts that are more sustainable and meaningful within SME marketing and therefore are able to contribute toward SME ETD and the work of the enterprise and development agencies (EDAs). The results of the thesis informs thinking on a range of marketing issues and also issues of ETD to more subject-specific areas such as marketing communications, word-of-mouth or networking.

The thesis aims therefore to provide a link between extant research and original contextualised reflection through the discourses of appropriate SME practitioners and ETD people. Stemming from the critical review of the existing frameworks and concepts, as well as from the exploration of the literature, this thesis develops a methodology for SME marketing investigation and applies this to the chosen SME context. It should be noted that in practice the SME participants had a mix of experience either in their current business or in a previous incarnation. I did try to stay with the focussed product-led context but it was found also that all participants had broader marketing perspectives and experience.

This therefore is the setting chosen for the collection of qualitative empirical data and the application of the proposed methodology that involves Discourse Analysis (DA), the employment of which allows the kind of analysis that is concerned with the social organisation of texts and therefore it is concerned with variability of accounts and interpretive repertoires of SME and ETD participants.

It became evident to me that I was proposing to look at relational and orthodox marketing and that I wished to apply these to the SME ETD context. This has been a preoccupation of mine throughout my career in marketing, even when working in multinational corporations as well as when working with SMEs. The inadequacies of orthodox marketing theories that I experienced first hand in practice, even in such multinational corporations, were tempered somewhat by the influx of relational marketing. I had always felt relationships in business pre-dated relationship marketing's academic arrival. Even so there was, for me, something missing. My interest in marketing philosophy meant that I was aware of the Frankfurt School and 'Critical Theory'. This led me to consideration of latter day Critical Theory and management. I was aware of other critical studies, such as feminism, but I was also aware of the limitations in scope of the research, even with a PhD.

The research question

There is, therefore, an assumption here that marketing as shaped over time by large corporations offers an inappropriate set of models and frameworks to many other contexts and in particular that of the SME owner-manager. The key research question is how SME and ETD participants 'see' marketing and what impact this might have on the provision of ETD in the SME context.

Objectives

This thesis explores views of reality put forward by the ontology of the chosen context in contrast to other marketing discourses, as well as the epistemological implications of any philosophical stances in marketing. The thesis employs a methodology for use in the stated context. The thesis critically reviews the existing works in the fields of relational, orthodox and critical marketing and interprets the works of key players in these fields. This includes the contribution of Critical Theory, postmodernism and contemporary work in entrepreneurial and SME marketing. In order to achieve the central aim of this research, the following objectives of the thesis are to:

- Explore the notion that if modernist marketing orthodoxy is inappropriate to the SME context, do other approaches such as relationship marketing, postmodern marketing or critical theory have something to offer?

- Consider that if the consequent marketing 'way of seeing' is significantly different in this context, whether marketing theory and practice are significantly different.

- Consider that if marketing is very different in this context, is there a new requirement to meet a different set of ETD needs that includes consideration of a different kind of subject matter?

- Make suggestions for further research.

Structure of this thesis

The thesis is divided into eight chapters, including the present one, and is structured in the following way:

The literature review contains three chapters (chapters two-four). The first concerns itself with marketing philosophy, past and present, and the importance of marketing context. The second deals with marketing management practice and the impact of relational marketing and Critical Theory in the SME context. The third concerns itself with ETD marketing for SMEs, skills and competencies, and the role of the enterprise and development agencies.

Chapter five discusses and justifies the ideas behind using a non-positivistic means of inquiry and instruments used, including the limitations of the primary research approaches. These are based on the transcripts of semi-structured interviews that eventually become research texts. The use of Discourse Analysis as a tool of analysis is explained and ethical issues addressed.

Chapter six is a presentation of themes that emerge from consideration of the narratives in the final research texts. The application of Discourse Analysis to the texts within each theme allows one or more discourses to emerge. Therefore this chapter reveals how themes are arrived at and how Discourse Analysis as a method of qualitative data analysis is used in this thesis. A framework for analysis is suggested along with practicalities and limitations that are addressed within this SME marketing and ETD context. The chapter also demonstrates that the research questions have been addressed.

Chapter seven is a synthesised discussion that provides conceptualisations and re-conceptualisations from a consideration of the findings of the empirical research and those from the literature. At the end of this chapter the ROC (relational, orthodox and critical) marketing schema is presented and explained.

Finally in Chapter eight, conclusions are drawn and reflexive and critical assessments of the work are made. The contribution of this thesis is stated, the ROC SME marketing schema is presented and explained and recommendations for further research made.

The thesis as a whole not only provides new ways of seeing SME marketing including relational, orthodox and critical perspectives but it also comments upon ETD and the role of the EDAs in the SME field. Overall, it contributes to and can be seen as part of a larger academic and intellectual sphere that has something to say about the practice of marketing in this very important area of economic and social activity.

Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the research question and the objectives of the research and introduced the reader to the motivations and context of the research. The literature review now follows.

CHAPTER TWO - MARKETING PHILOSOPHY PAST AND PRESENT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTEXT

Introduction

Marketing as science, marketing as art

There has been a debate in marketing circles, for at least the last five decades, that addresses the question is marketing a science (for example Bartels, 1951, Bartels, 1974, Hunt, 1976, Baker, 2000a, Baker, 2000b). Despite proclamations from marketing gurus such as Hunt (1988:60) that the positive (as opposed to normative) ‘dimensions of marketing can be appropriately referred to as marketing science’, there has been a temptation to switch, apparently completely, from science to a ‘marketing is art’ stance and pursue aesthetics instead of scientific discovery (for example Wright and Pickton, 1995, Belk, 1995, Prothero, 1995, Hetzel, 1997, Halliday, 1997, Belk, 1997). Now is the time, it seems, to stop and think through what being a positivist, or not, in marketing might actually mean. Marketing went from strength to strength during the 20th century and has not waned in popularity into the 21st century. Marketing has been taken on board by a host of public/not-for-profit sectors and others, including industrial managers, who appear at least to be determined to become marketing oriented and see marketing as a new way to understand their industry, competitors, and very existence.

The aim of this chapter

The aim of this chapter is to explore the views of reality in marketing put forward by the ontology of various marketing discourses, as well as the epistemological implications of any philosophical stances in marketing. This involves critically reviewing the existing works in the field of modernist (orthodox) marketing, relational marketing, postmodern marketing and critical approaches to marketing and interpreting the works of key players in these fields.

The objectives of this chapter

This chapter has four key objectives. Firstly, it seeks to show that the argument over marketing, as a science/art is somewhat of an indulgence on the part of academics. Secondly, it seeks to explore marketing history in relation to theory. Thirdly, it seeks to identify marketing issues in differing contexts. Fourthly, it looks at the scope of marketing in relation to theoretical development and the potential directions in which marketing might develop.

The link between this chapter and the research question is marketing orthodoxy and whether this is inappropriate to the SME context and if so, then perhaps other approaches have something to offer. For example marketing is belatedly seen as a necessary function of the various parts of the public sector yet the transference of the core, orthodox marketing techniques from private to public sector is extremely problematic (Smith and Thomas, 1981, Kent, 1986, Mercer, 1993, Graham, 1994, Hooley, 1995, Strachan and Hope, 1995, Lawther, Hastings and Lowry, 1997). The longstanding myths of orthodox models and their transference are therefore identified and discussed.

Science, positivism and paradigms

Positivism

Positivism is a view of the world that sees there is only one objective truth. However, even in positivist terms, not all departments of knowledge reach a positive stage at the same time if at all. Comte's (widely regarded as the founding father of sociology) General View of Positivism, expounded over the period 1830-42, has been much used in terms of the argument that a discipline will reach the positive stage early in proportion to its generality, simplicity and independence. Mathematics is historically the first of the positive sciences followed by astronomy, terrestrial physics, chemistry and biology and social physics (sociology), which would become positive also. In the logical hierarchy each science depended on the one beneath it. For example astronomy depended on positive mathematics in order to be positive itself. In Comte's view each science was independent, for example biology could not be reduced to chemistry and so on, that is, each science could handle its own sphere - explain its own reality, explanations without recourse, necessarily, to that immediately below it in the hierarchy. Discovery leads to further discovery and in this view this is how science progresses. Therefore the practitioner should follow hunches and imprecise ideas. Knowledge will always be personal and has a tacit component that leads to the breakthrough rather than the blind alley (Comte translation by Blunden, 2005).

Scientific knowledge and paradigms

40 years ago knowledge was much talked and written about, by such greats as Medawar (for example 1960) and Polanyi, (for example 1958). Polanyi was interested essentially in personal, tacit knowledge and its contribution to the understanding of social and scientific discovery. Acts of discovery are as much to do with personal feelings and commitments as anything else (Polanyi, 1958). Polanyi’s science is not therefore value free, where reasoned and critical interrogation and other more tacit forms of knowledge are brought together. The basis for this is that we can know more than we can tell, and a pre-logical phase of knowledge is a tacit one where a range of personal, conceptual information is brought to bear on the situation, Polanyi preferring open dialogue within a community rather than the rather more closed ‘pure science’. Polanyi, still, saw scientific knowledge in a paradigmatic way. Here, the word paradigm is understood as a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them, especially in an intellectual discipline (Farlex, 2005).

Medawar (1960) also talks of scientific knowledge in terms of paradigms. Medawar’s Nobel Lecture of 1960 was based around immunological tolerance. One can see from this lecture that Medawar was putting forward a more general case of how the scientific community builds knowledge. Take the example of inhibition of drug allergy and its meaning, potentially, to transplantation immunity. Medawar comments that ‘I have put it last because it is the least easy to classify, though it might turn out to be the paradigm of all such phenomena' (Medawar, 1960:5). Medawar was interested in verification by independent means but that 'tolerance does not yet follow from any hypothesis of the nature of the immune response' (Medawar, 1960:6).

However, two figures of most significance in terms of philosophical effects on marketing were perhaps Popper and Kuhn. It was Popper (1963) who questioned traditional ideas on scientific laws being the result only of observation and experiment. Popper's 'falsification principle' (if all cats are black is the theory we can never verify this because all cats cannot be observed but the appearance of one white cat falsifies the theory) maintains that scientific theories cannot be said to be true but at best might not be proven false. Popper rejected induction in favour of his own method of 'conjecture and refutation'. Thus hunches, guesses (conjectures) about nature can be made. Like the cat example, these can then be rejected or refuted but never accepted fully. For Popper, everything is conjecture and at best a hypothesis might be corroborated by some form of empirical evidence. Kuhn's (1962, 1971) account of the development of science is probably one of the most cited academic books of all time (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2004). Kuhn's central point was that science progresses through periods of stable growth but also through revisionary revolutions. Kuhn added the incommensurability thesis – theories from different periods fail to be comparable. For Kuhn the function of a paradigm is to feed problems for scientists to solve as well as providing the tools for their solution. Crises can occur when this fails and the paradigm is superseded by another.

Science, marketing and social institutions

Science, marketing and other professions can be viewed as social institutions with the practitioner picking up the values and norms of the discipline. Marketing, it was thought, could be placed on a par with the social sciences in this hierarchy. It was clear 40 years or more ago that in academic circles, for instance, a university faculty, to be acclaimed scientific, would potentially enhance a discipline's chances of increasing its finances and reputation. This panic to be scientific had perhaps caused marketing to become a spoilt brat rather than a child of the social sciences, in a young or early stage of development. If the scientific route of Medawar (1960) is taken, then marketing should not feature at all for consideration as a science.

If, on the other hand, the view of science as being historical/social/cultural and consisting of paradigms in the sense that Kuhn (1962, 1971**)** meant it i.e. that science be viewed as a social institution, then the temptation to place marketing (as a social institution) in the marketing is science camp might be logical. However rather than the healthy scepticism of science, orthodox marketing and its tenants could be viewed as dogmatic prescriptions rather than open exploration. The word paradigm is here used in the Kuhnian sense of a body of knowledge having reached a point to maturity whereby laws, such as the laws of physics, can be made. This would make orthodox marketing a non-paradigmatic body of knowledge.

Marketing history and theory

Marketing and change

It had been proclaimed that marketing was still young and at that point without paradigms and therefore marketing could not be a science (Bartels, 1951), although those who promoted marketing in the early days as a scientific discipline (for example McCarthy, 1960, Kotler, 1967) did so with the now infamous 4Ps (product, place, price and promotion) as the central model. The development of marketing from 1900-1940 had been through specialisms such as advertising and distribution. Indeed these functions have been around for thousands of years. Marketing as it became known began to coalesce in the USA in the 1920s. Generally though the pre-1920s have become known as the production era (excess demand, production focus) and from 1920-1950 the sales era (excess supply, competition focus). From the 1950s onward the marketing concept was dominant (focus on consumer need) but by the 1990s this was being qualified within orthodoxy as being about need but also value. The changes taking place included, for example, virtual marketing solutions, or as Schultz and Kitchen (2000) had it, a transition from market place to market space.

In Britain in particular, advertising had been well developed but it would be the multi-national corporations (MNCs) that would pose a serious threat to local commerce i.e. commerce of a particular community, society and culture. Historically, pre and during the industrial revolution, goods sold themselves while demand outstripped supply but as things developed advertising became more powerful and was even seen as a dangerous force (Witzel, 2000). Aspects of marketing are evident across time with evidence of branding very early in the Chinese Dynasties. Trade routes and traders have been studied and it seems that the 17th century is interesting for advertising in particular. Trademarks through time became indicators of quality and by the 19th century there was already scepticism of advertising, it being seen by some as a waste because it was too broad and could not discriminate (Witzel, 2000).

Quality, branding, services and especially consumer behaviour became of interest to scholars as is evident from the inclusion of such items of study in universities. The 20th century saw the emergence of psychology, psychoanalysis and the influence of Freud with, for example, marketers' interest in the subconscious responses to stimuli. By 1910 there was interest in relational marketing with mail order selling developing, facilitated by improved postal systems, the ability to personalise offers and to achieve repeat business and offer better deals to existing customers (Witzel, 2000). Witzel notes that relationship marketing did not get taken seriously academically until the 1990s after the Harvard Business Review began, during the 1980s, making the same point in earnest as had been made at the turn of the century. Interest in the perceptive sciences had led to scientific management that could place diffused elements into an organised whole of knowledge management (Witzel, 2000).

Marketing as science/marketing as art

The marketing as science/marketing as art has been a central academic debate with writers like Brown (1995b) suggesting that marketing is art or practice resembling engineering more than the physical sciences. Scientific status was sought yet it is hard to dispute socially constructed realities and phenomena with human actors where meaning is socially constructed (after Berger and Luckman, 1967). McDonagh's (1995) advocations of both methodological pluralism and the need to broaden the mind to other key issues in society hold weight. These are O'Shaughnessy's (1995) sentiments also but with the social sciences there is the still to be solved problems such as those of methodology and measurement. Murray and O'Driscoll (1995) point to the integrated, holistic approach seeing marketing in a broader church, a wider context and advocate creative thinking to meet the changes that marketing requires. Carson, Gilmore and Maclaran (1995) advocate the reconciliation between theory and practice. Hackley (1999:728) attempts to get away from mere prescription toward a 'model of philosophically informed inquiry'.

The AIDA-type model

The marketing as science debate would raise its head later but the interest in scientific principles as applied to functions like advertising began much earlier in terms of, for example, the AIDA-type model that dealt with attention, comprehension, understanding and liking through to arriving at preferences and taking action. The AIDA model that is still used in textbooks today stands for awareness, interest, desire and action. It suggests a logical hierarchical sequence of effects on a recipient of some form of communication, usually advertising although one of the first references to AIDA was in the field of sales and selling by Strong (1925). This involves the cognitive (awareness), affective (interest and desire) and behavioural (action) domains.

This model continued (and to this day continues) to be developed so that by the 1960s Lavidge and Steiner (1961) had developed the 'Hierarchy of Effects' model that sought to be a model for predictive measurement of advertising effectiveness. A latter day example of the use of the AIDA or Hierarchy of Effects approach is that of Dubois and Paternault (1995) seeking to understand the stages that buyers go through in reaction to luxury goods and the mechanisms underlying these reactions. Such reactions are often described as impulsive, emotional or extravagant. This is an attempt to understand the impenetrable 'black box' model of consumer behaviour. Another example is that of researchers at the University of Bath, interested in measuring affective advertising in the area of low attention processing on recall (Heath and Nairn, 2005). They claim that results of research support the theory of advertising that relies upon emotions and feelings. This is likely to benefit from longer periods of repeat exposure. Recall-based metrics like Claimed Ad Awareness are likely to seriously underestimate effectiveness of this kind of advertising. However, from these latter day examples it can be seen that there is an acceptance of the hierarchical nature of advertising working, based on a model that is far from being problem-free. There is evidence that within the cognitive and affective domains much has and is being done, but there is criticism of the lack of meaningful work in the behavioural domain. It has also been criticised for merely measuring communication effects and not effects on return on investment in the communications area (Schultz and Kitchen, 2000).

Marketing concepts

Jones (2000) discusses the 1950s era where there was a focus on marketing concepts, stemming from economics, within areas such as retailing, sales management, marketing research and marketing theory. Jones comments that many of the authors from this period received the American Marketing Association's Paul D. Converse Award, highlighting the interest shown in history, but soon after this the interest in history and the evolution of marketing waned in favour of interest in science and quantitative methods. Converse (1945) was one of the first to write, in the Journal of Marketing, about marketing as a science. The idea that there was some sort of mix going on or a recipe for successful commerce had been alluded to well before Converse's article but the date of this article is clearly important.

Buzzell (1963) had declared marketing not as a science (abandon this wild goose chase) but as a discipline that uses and applies things from the social sciences and in particular things from the behavioural sciences. Other writers had also declared something similar, perhaps for obvious reasons such as the control/lack of control of variables (for example Alderson and Cox, 1948). At this point, a consensus appeared to be building that positivism be abandoned because marketing involves too many variables, so that unlike in science, variables cannot be controlled. Marketing knowledge in this view is lore, not scientific knowledge.

Psychographics had entered the marketing world as early as the 1920s, better facilitating segmentation and targeting. Psychographics is a term that describes consumer target audience on the basis of psychological characteristics determined by standardised tests. This work was pioneered by the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) where the VALS (values and life styles) system of segmentation and segments helped fill the gaps around the basic, harder data that is demography. Set against the latter, psychographic profiles are based on softer, fuzzier data that helps build shared characteristics of groups of people.

Marketing was increasingly being seen as a new discipline with service, quality, marketing research and especially scientific method as core parts of the whole. By the 1970s marketing had established standard texts and journals, used as vehicles of communication, which could mean an advance toward maturity in some areas of marketing. Marketing theory and practice were seen then as simple in the empirical philosophical sense, marketing having only a few, simple general principles and not much of an advance on the 1950s. Bartels (1951) had put it that marketing had no laws with any dignity i.e. at best it had only tentative generalisations which are very rare in the marketing literature. Marketing was said to differ by degree of objectivism rather than kind. Yet still Bartels had gone a little further, seeing marketing as a discipline in a collective science of social behaviour, not just economics but also behavioural concepts such as roles and ethics, but clearly as Popperian science.

Societal marketing

Kotler and Levy (1969) had brought non-business marketing into the picture, for example, the social marketing of churches and Police departments in terms of general exchange as opposed to the narrow transaction definition of Luck (1969). By about the same time, writers (such as Lavidge, 1970) were asking, for example, not can a product be sold but should it be sold? Kotler and Zeltman (1971) moved further into the societal role area, coining the term ‘societal marketing’. Hunt (1988) highlights the infamous ‘March of Dimes’ (a charity whose mission was and still is stated as to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects and infant mortality) campaign as originally discussed by Mindak and Bybee (1971), as one of the first of many such campaigns.

By 1972, Kotler had moved toward transactions, being specifically concerned how these are created, stimulated, facilitated and valued. As Burton (2001) points out, this was the beginning of what would become known as macromarketing, involving the debate around the marketing concept and the broadening of it. For Burton (2001:723) this

> "Heralded the beginning of a critical discourse that later became known as macromarketing, the primary function of which was to locate marketing in its wider social, economic, political and historical context".

There was, however, concern that marketing would be considered a social science and this would broaden the gap between theory and practice.

Marketing's definitional problems

Luck (1974) talks of a semantic jungle in terms of definitional problems and Bartels (1974) surmised that marketing would lose its identity and reappear under another name. What was being discussed was basically the scope of marketing in terms of what phenomena should be included or excluded. Hunt's (1976) preoccupation is with the problem of fitting societal marketing into the '4 Ps' model demonstrating a blind acceptance of, perhaps even adherence to or blind faith in, both. The '4 Ps' had been popularised by McCarthy in the 1960s (McCarthy, 1960). Kotler, by the early 1970s, had introduced the idea of non-profit marketing. Kotler (1972) espoused the virtue to the American Marketing Association of using micro, macro, and normative and positive approaches. In 1976 Hunt was using American Marketing Association definitions of marketing regarding exchange and the flow of goods and services from producer to consumer but considered this too restrictive, there not being enough to define marketing in terms of business activities or social processes. Hunt (1976, 1988), however, used these ideas to produce a set of grids that attempt to categorise activities into:

- Positive or Normative
- Micro or Macro
- Profit or Not for profit

Thus everything has its place in Hunt's scheme of things such as:

Micro/positive/profit – how a firm decides on price
Micro/normative/profit – make a price decision
Macro/positive/profit – legal aspects of marketing
Macro/normative/profit – whether distribution costs are too high
Micro/positive/not for profit – determine product decisions
Micro/normative/not for profit – make product decisions
Macro/positive//not for profit – does advertising influence behaviour?
Macro/normative/not for profit – should a politician be sold like toothpaste?

(From Hunt, 1988:51-52)

Interestingly, Hunt uses the Kotleresque analysing, organising and planning language to describe marketing as a science after considering numerous other writers' commentary on the marketing is art/science dichotomy. For example Hunt (1976) uses discussions on laws, chronology and marketing is art by Hutchinson (1952) and no scientific method, no science by Bunge (1967), to suggest three areas that define a science. The first is the need for subject matter classification. The second is the search for underlying uniformities and regularities that a science seeks to discover. The third is the need for inter-subjectively certifiable procedures for studying subject matter. Hunt, remarkably, concludes that marketing meets all three but lacks scientific method yet even more remarkably comes to the overall conclusion that the more 'positive' dimensions of marketing can be referred to as 'marketing science' (Hunt, 1976:27).

The need for marketing theory

Concern over lack of progress was short sighted, bogged down by the mutual premise that the social sciences would in time be as scientific as science. Brown (1995b) concludes that the reason the necessary unique body of theory did not materialise, was because marketing was not and is not a science. There appears to be support still for the idea of marketing as a social science. O'Shaughnessy (1995) points towards economics and psychology but warns that while we are all still familiar with the links, marketing has not perhaps capitalised on such support to help with its needs. This is not just in terms of methodology although it is important to realise that natural science is pluralistic about this, let alone the social sciences. Hetzel (1995) points toward the new social demands, that require marketing to change, even enter into a Renaissance. There appears to be an endless list of supporters of this and much discussion in this area, for example Brown (1995a, 1995b). Marketing rising from the ashes like a phoenix (Hetzel 1995) is an idea that is typical of the new marketing mentality.

More latterly Saren (2000) discusses the establishment of the Marketing Science Institute in terms of why there is a need for informed theory. Three things are highlighted. The first is that without a theoretical base it is not possible to analyse. The second is that better decisions can be made with the help of theory. The third reason is that it is not desirable for marketers or marketing academics to be magpies that borrow. The need for theory is there to avoid fire fighting and to anticipate and avoid marketing problems and to make sense of the world.

Arguing the case that marketing theory matters but that there is and has been a lack of theorists and theory courses in colleges and universities and misguided perceptions of practitioner-oriented research, Burton (2005) calls for a more theoretically-driven marketing. Burton argues that extensive theory borrowing has not resulted in theory-driven marketing. While marketing academics cite extensively from other disciplines, the reverse is not the case. This is defended by the business practitioner being a key stakeholder i.e. marketing exists to support business, not other academics. Burton also argues that marketing knowledge is not valued by business because:

- There is no requirement for a marketing qualification for graduate marketing posts. Graduates from any discipline are considered.
- There is no relationship between marketing education and company performance.
- There are few Marketing Directors on the boards of large companies in the USA and UK.

- There is no real status for marketing practitioners or academics.
- Marketing textbooks are largely of the ‘how to do it’ variety.
- There is a gulf between academic and practitioner knowledge i.e. in designing marketing management systems and support, practitioners are likely to know the answers, not the academics.
- Academics in marketing are often from other disciplines where they have failed to make the grade and there is a repository of intellectually inferior members.

(From Burton, 2005:6)

Burton concedes that this last point is particularly harsh but argues that a number of main areas arise when considering the lack of theoretical development in marketing. There is a lack of theorists, theory courses, theory syllabus that is widely agreed upon, of critical approaches and of appropriate marketing theory texts. There are also, in Burton’s view, problems with business school priorities, the nature of publication-driven marketing and a misplaced conception of practitioner-oriented research. These shortcomings cannot, for Burton, be solved without action on three levels; at the individual teaching and research agenda level, at the community level with agreement on a collective syllabus and at the institutional level with support for developments that would be useful for doctoral training. What is critically missing from this approach is perhaps some idea of the strength of perception as to whether marketing actually works in terms of effectiveness and its acceptance as a discipline. For Brownlie and Saren (1992) a different approach would be to find answers in marketing as a discipline and discourses that are socially and politically constructed.

The imposition of orthodox marketing outside of the ‘big business’ context and counters to this

The challenge to marketing orthodoxy

Over the last two decades things have begun to change somewhat in terms of the challenge to marketing orthodoxy. Brown (1995b) recognises the contribution to marketing from the art side supporting innovation or creativity. This embroils the whole idea of marketing as art or science back into the debate on the nature of the social sciences. Brown also uses Bartel's (1951) logic to illustrate how clearly flawed this was i.e. just because one finds some evidence of scientific method in market research does not mean to say that marketing would become a science in the fullness of time. There is no Kuhnian paradigm for marketing. Statistics and QM (among other things) were beginning to be used in the social sciences and the development of those applications simply meant just that.

Jones (2000) takes this historical perspective still further into the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Jones uses Firat's (1986) advocacy of marketing history through interpretation and reflection (hermeneutics), Stern's (1990) literary criticism and Smith and Lux's (1993) model of consumer behaviour through historical research as examples. Heeler and Chung (2000), in a similar vein, discuss the impact of economics, the idea of the market economy and the emergence of exchange as a basis for marketing. The various kinds of exchange that appear in the literature to this day (for example economic or utilitarian) are based on the assumption that man is rational and that full and complete information is available to support this. The counter to this approach to (consumer) behaviour is well used in the marketing literature. Heeler and Chung (2000) argue that the producer seeking profit maximisation while the consumer seeking utility maximisation are economic concepts and positivist in outlook through specialisation and division of labour. This had led to cross fertilisation between economists and marketers and shaped the orientation towards the scientific foundation of marketing. However there has been counter argument against rational man, for example Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) produced a seminal piece on hedonistic behaviour.

The transference of marketing orthodoxy to other contexts

Copley and Robson (1996) believe that the pressure to deliver a free market for UK public sector services, through tight fiscal control, increased competition (including compulsory competitive tendering), and many other policy measures, has driven public sector organisations toward the use of the tools of the various management functions. These have evolved in business in the post-World War Two period viz. marketing, total quality management (TQM) and business process re-engineering, to name but a few. It has been argued that the benefits of this apparent paradigm shift in public sector service provision are clear. The purchaser/provider relationship has become key. A major concern is the transference of the prevailing paradigm of marketing, which clearly has not been a universal success in the private sector, into the many and varied areas of the public sector. The main tendency seems to have been simply to apply what is known about marketing from commercial organisations to the aforementioned sectors, without any critical analysis or concern (Graham, 1994). This attitude can be found in articles like the one of Bennett (1994:24) who uses an orthodox business planning model ('traditional wisdom') to explore the Health Service and a move from strategy to action. Thus the usual 'where are we now?' where are we going?' and 'how are we going to get there?'- type questions are asked. Also, to aid this, Ansoff's (1957) product/market expansion matrix and the classic SWOT analysis are applied to this context without any apparent reservation or critical evaluation of what this might mean.

The survey has been in use for some time in areas of activities other than big business but the use of broader marketing research is a relatively new phenomenon. The measurement of opinion has been going on for some time but it is really only relatively recently that 'user surveys', based as they are on cost reduction for standardised questionnaire design which makes data processing and reporting that much easier and less costly, have been criticised. Such surveys also provide comparability, yet they have serious weaknesses (Strachan and Hope, 1995). Qualitative research of sorts has been used in, for example, the arts but research, such as that by Saker and Cave, (1995) is interesting and illuminating but rare. Writing in the not-for-profit area abounds, for example Kotler and Andreasen (1991) on orientation being just one of many in the orthodox marketing mould. Another example is that of Lawther et al (1997) on de-marketing (after Kotler and Levy, 1971) who adopt this concept without apparently questioning what de-marketing really means and therefore accepting that, for example, advertising will stimulate demand.

Harris and Rees (1995) appear even more partisan and opportunistic with their marketing's second coming, suggesting that there is life in the old marketing dog yet, as long as its applied somewhere (the not-for-profit sector) where old concepts appear to be a panacea to ills. Of course these sectors will embrace marketing phenomena, but that does not mean to say they should be sold an alleged cure-all that is problematic elsewhere. There is evidence that more thoughtful, focused approaches exist in the public sector. For example Gold (1994) looks at place promotion as image communication. Gold is interested in the message of the media and therefore meaning through encoding. What is evident from this is the reliance on social sciences and in particular cultural studies literature (rather than marketing literature) in order to construct discourse. Graham (1994), is concerned about how marketing is transposed into its broadened domain, a view that is not dissimilar to the view expressed here i.e. seek to better understand the context before transposing anything.

The scope of marketing, theoretical development and alternative directions for marketing

Below is a consideration of the usefulness and problems associated with three 'ways of seeing' marketing that have been identified in the literature: orthodox marketing; relationship marketing; and critical marketing. It should be noted that the literature appears contradictory in the sense that there are differing interpretations as to what, for example, Critical Theory is composed of. For Hetrick and Lozada, (1999) Critical Theory and postmodernism are oppositional. This follows the logic of Habermas (the German philosopher, sociologist and associate of Horkheimer, Adorno and the Frankfurt School), who did not agree that postmodernism should be held within Critical Theory. Burton (2001) suggests that there are more points of convergence than divergence. Hetrick and Lozada (1999) make a clear distinction between traditional, critical and postmodern marketing which they call respectively marketing theory, anti-marketing theory and marketing anti-theory. On the other hand as Burton (2001) points out, in the 1998 call for papers in the marketing stream of the 1st International Critical Management Conference held at UMIST in 1999, organisers Saren and Brownlie indicate that they would include any approach that draws on substantive critical traditions such as feminism, Marxism or environmentalism. They include in the list postmodernism. Here I follow this lead and include Critical Theory and postmodernism as the constituent parts of critical marketing, other elements of critical studies such as feminism being beyond the scope of this thesis.

Orthodox marketing

Nature

Concern about the damage done to marketing's standing through adherence to the orthodox marketing way in its original context i.e. big business and its adoption (or even imposition) by the very many other contexts, alluded to above, is not without foundation. Therefore opinion now abounds (for example Kent, 1986, Graham, 1994, Burton, 2005) that is either for or against the marketing concept itself or other orthodox marketing models. The acceptance of the modernist paradigm, especially in the NHS (Lawther et al 1997) is alarming but this is not, thankfully, a universal thing (Copley, 1997). At least Graham (1994) calls for a rigorous and systematic review. Thus the word paradigm is used here not in the Kuhnian sense but as defined by Farlex (2005) as a set of assumptions, concepts, values and practices that is in effect a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them.

Orthodox marketing as a body of knowledge has been built up, not from systematic empiricism over time, but largely from observation of activities in situ. For example, in order to link present performance to future plans and build performance criteria ‘for better market orientation’, Bennett (1994:32) applies the modernist orthodoxy in panacea-like way for the Health Service context.

Yaakobi et al (1997) is typical of the belief in marketing orientation being the means to creating and sustaining organisational culture that is committed to providing superior customer value. In this view of the world marketing orientation and organisational learning are closely related but where the organisation needs to match its value offer to the customer segment (s) that are most responsive and where relationships comprise a valid aspect of strategic management. Added to this is the need to develop more flexible organisational structures in order to gain competitive advantage. Thus Yaakobi et al (1994:474) advocate:

- Market-driven culture
- Learning process
- Unique value proposition
- Leverage distinct capabilities
- Make relationship strategy decisions inside and outside the organisation
- Implement necessary change

In a similar paper Cravens et al (1997) advocate market-driven business and performance through the matching of value offer to segment/target needs with a focus on organisational capabilities that provide competitive advantage, with a switch from functional to inter-functional coordination. Here Cravens et al conclude that it is winning the struggle for comparative advantage that will produce competitive advantage in the marketplace thereby resulting in superior financial performance. However these authors are not advocating following the orthodox marking line absolutely but include relationships and a form of critical management also through the management of change that includes internal processes and management approaches. Thus, like Pearson (1993) this is accepting of the modernist orthodoxy. Rather than simply accepting the possibilities of production, product, selling and even societal marketing orientations as alternatives to the marketing concept, Cravens et al (1997) combine, in a sense, orthodox marketing with relationship marketing and a critical management approach (returned to later in this literature review). Pearson (1993) makes the point that none of these orientations are mutually exclusive. Rather than the simple ‘get close to the customer’ mantra of basic texts, the possibilities of other orientations such as those of accounting/cost, production/technological and R&D/innovation should be taught and in textbooks.

As with Cravens et al, Ellis (2005) contends that implementation of the marketing concept boosts organisational performance (by delivering value based on needs analysis). Rather than market orientation, marketing practice is a superior predictor of business performance. It is high marketing practice that helps firms outperform those with low marketing practice. This reinforces the idea of the marketing concept as a universal construct when measured in terms of specific business activities.

Developing a marketing oriented culture is explained by Harris and Ogbonna (1999:180) who highlight the difficulties in achieving the necessary organisational culture ‘that creates the necessary behaviour for creating value’. Harris and Ogbonna recognise two broad areas of barriers to market orientation; the identification of tangible organisational creations and people issues. The former includes structure and control mechanisms and the latter imperfect decision-making and top management ability. Organisational culture is pluralistic and qualitative and cannot be created, sustained and abandoned as easily as orthodox marketers might assume. For Harris and Ogbonna the assumption that values can easily be shared is a problematic proposition.

On a more practical note, Mintzberg (1994b) sees strategy making as a learning process but argues that planners should not create strategies. Rather, they should supply data that can help managers to think strategically and help with vision, where the most successful strategies are visions of direction not plans. Mintzberg prefers learning through the synthesis of hard and soft inputs and is in favour of a committing style of management that engages with people and not a calculating style that simply states the destination. Mintzberg contends that planning has been used as a means to control. Many managers welcome the overthrow of strategic planning, commitment being the key in the face of three fallacies:

- Prediction, where intuition is required.
- Detachment, where the system does the thinking and strategies are detached from tactics and thinkers from doers but inadvertent or emergent strategies need to be considered (people are after all involved).
- Formalisation, whereby formal systems offer no improved means of dealing with information overload and comprehension and synthesis are affected.

Mintzberg (1994b:110-111)

It is quite clear, therefore, that a good many models and concepts, including the marketing concept itself, form this body of marketing knowledge but over time, especially in the last two decades, academics and to an extent practitioners have overtly began to question their real worth and even the ability to cause actual harm.

Orthodox marketing models

The kinds of models in orthodox marketing tend to be empirically-based, such as the theory of the product life cycle (PLC), the 4P's or the 'black box' models common in for example consumer behaviour that are subjective conceptualisations open to a number of interpretations. These are the kind of models that have their uses in terms of being able to conceptualise things and help the manager to manage but not to predict and they have other associated problems. Some examples are given immediately below.

- The 4Ps

For Kent (1986) adherence to the '4 P's' as the marketing paradigm has been potentially lethal because it leads to a false sense of simplicity. Kent calls for more of a holistic approach. There is support for the 4P's as a paradigm for basic marketing but not for marketing management (Houston, Gassenheimer and Maskulka, 1992). This might help academics but would be pointless to marketing practice. Many topics within the marketing arena do not fit into the boxes, hence the many attempts to extend the 4P model (for example Dobscha and Foxinan, 1998, Anderson and Taylor, 1995). It has inadequate theoretical grounding and it is incompatible with relationship marketing (Gronroos, 1994a). For Yudelson (1999) the 4P model does not integrate with the exchange paradigm. In fact the 4Ps model is seemingly in opposition to exchange according to Hyman (2001). The model does not account for the full range of recognised marketing activities, does not account for interactions between the P's and other topics and focuses only on acquisition (Dobscha and Foxinan, 1998). It is a general catch-all for activities that are clearly recognisable in their own right such as sponsorship (van Waterschoot and van den Bulte, 1992, Copley, 2004). Constantinides (2006) reports on a raft of models similar to the 4Ps but which largely attempt to marry the mix and relationship approaches. This involves descriptors such as ‘relationships’ as part of a ‘4Rs’ model and ‘collaboration’ as part of a ‘4Cs’ model. Constantinides’ (2006:429) own 4S model ‘offers a comprehensive, integral approach on managing the online presence – Scope (strategic issues), Site (operational issues), Synergy (organisational issues) and System (technological issues). Unfortunately it would seem that the 4P list has been extended into more Ps. Other mnemonics such as 4Cs or 4Ss have been devised that appear to have the same kind of problems as the original 4Ps.

- The product life cycle (PLC)

With the product life cycle (PLC), many are often critical yet still drawn to this favoured orthodox marketing model (Smith and Thomas, 1981). Others are more critical. Hooley (1995) bleakly urges readers to try it (the lifecycle) and see for themselves. As early as 1976 Dhalla and Yuspeh were suggesting in the Harvard Business Review that we should ‘forget the PLC concept’ (Dhalla and Yuspeh, 1976:102). Perhaps it is his track record outside academia that allows Mercer (1993:19) to conclude that the PLC ‘should be eliminated from the marketer’s vocabulary’.

- The stage models

The stage models in their many and various forms are obviously flawed. There are a good many stage models included in marketing knowledge, many of which are hierarchical. This is so of the management of marketing communications and other sub-functions of marketing and marketing itself in terms of the APIC (analysis, planning, implementation and control)-type management model. A key criticism is that such models are too rigid and not flexible enough to cope with the rigors and realities of 21st century commerce and life in general. More generally there are many more impediments to implementing planning (Simkin, 2002). For Gronroos (1994a) employment of such flawed models serves only to have made teaching easier with disastrous consequences. Saren (1994), Mercer (1993), and Gronroos (1994a) have attempted to take this forward with alternative models or approaches.

- The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) share/growth matrix

The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) share/growth matrix is not without problems, especially within marketing pedagogy. For Morrison and Wensley (1991) there are considerable areas of concern in terms of the teaching of such techniques. Designed for senior executives to help cope with the strategic management of business units, the BCG box has been criticised for lack of realism in many contexts to which it has been applied. But as Morrison and Wensley point out, academic criticism has been misplaced because the box has been adopted as a comprehensive theory of markets and company performance. There is perhaps some evidence of lack of corporate experience on the part of those who teach in business schools. For Morrison and Wensley (1991:105):

> "the Boston Box has become an approach which "boxes in" strategic thinking and is therefore dysfunctional rather than "boxing up" relevant and useful analysis in an effective manner".
>
> (Morrison and Wensley, 1991:105)

The matrix was of its time and designed for strategic business units as in companies within groups of (large) companies or corporations and not for SMEs, other organisations such as charitable causes, or product portfolio management, all of which the matrix has been applied to by academics over the years.

- Ansoff's Matrix

Ansoff's (1957) Matrix is another cornerstone of orthodox, theoretical marketing. The Product/Market Expansion Matrix or Grid was originally conceived as an aid for business unit strategy processes to help determine business growth opportunities. Despite its age management practitioners believe it to be a valuable model for communication around business unit strategy processes and business growth, for example consultancies such as 12MANAGE (2005). Much of the application of this tool is in the big business context but this is not a predictive tool or model, although it may help managers make sense of their world and it certainly is a useful teaching tool. However Watts, Cope and Hulme (1998), looking at growth strategies and adaptive learning among small food producers in the North West of England, manage to link Ansoff's Matrix to personal characteristics and goals of the owner-manager. Watts, Cope and Hulme (1998) use Greiner's (1972) life cycle model (a depiction of growth as a phase of stable expansion with periodic crises resulting in successful adoption and learning facilitating a further phase of growth). This model and others are accepted for their 'intuitive descriptive reasonableness' (Watts, Cope and Hulme, 1998:103). In this scenario the crises become growing pains and SME strategy (Watts, Cope and Hulme, 1998, after Fuller, 1994) is reactive and to do with the marriage of limited pro-activity to personal management that provides an involved marketing style (Watts, Cope and Hulme, 1998, after Carson, 1990) i.e. direct and intuitive with common sense thrown in. Of course in this context strategic choices are naturally limited and that is where Ansoff's Matrix is brought in by Watts, Cope and Hulme (1998, after Perry, 1987, who had suggested that the most appropriate growth strategies for SMEs fall into the product development and market development cells of the matrix). Watts, Cope and Hulme (1998:11), in an attempt to marry Greiner's (1972) concept of a crisis with Ansoff's Matrix end up rejecting the former and lean toward a ' "systems" view of the firm' that involves ideas such as personal management, intuition and involvement. Ansoff's Matrix appears to be a bystander in all of this.

Relationship marketing

Nature

Shrivastava and Kale (2003) maintain that relationship marketing in consumer markets came to the forefront of marketing in the 1990s. Opinion on customer relationship management and relationship marketing in the literature is varied. McDonald (2001) maintains that neither is new but there is much support for this kind of approach to marketing (for example Piercy, 1999, Gronroos, 1994a, Stone, Woodcock and Wilson, 1996). For Shrivastava and Kale (2003:61):

> "A paradigm shift in marketing at the expense of the 4Ps was foreshadowed…and new schools of thought - the Anglo-Australian School, the Emory School, the Nordic School – emerged. Inevitably, as the dust begins to settle, questions are being asked about how much of relationship marketing is rhetoric and how much is reality".

Much that is written about relationships is positive but there is some negative commentary. Shrivastava and Kale (2003) note the reluctance to transfer ideas from services and BtoB contexts to the consumer context whereby there is a lack of certainty about how applicable relationship marketing is in consumer markets. Relationships can be one-sided or at least not mutually beneficial or lacking in an exit strategy that makes it difficult for one or more parties to extricate themselves from the relationship. Also, getting into relationships can be irrational because to do so, by definition, reduces choice (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995).

Internal and external marketing

Internal marketing is integral to relationship marketing (Buttle, 1996, Gronroos, 1990) that has been defined as 'all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges' (Morgan and Hunt, 1994:22). Buttle also lists supportive culture, understanding customer expectations and like Coviello, Brodie and Munro (2000) use of sophisticated data bases. Buttle's fifth key to successful relationships is the possible need for incentives and reward schemes that can be seen in organisational marketing, in terms of salaries and performance incentives. This can also be seen in consumer advertising messages for the likes of banks or insurance companies who wish to announce that they are willing to reward loyalty. For Buttle, sales people have become relationship people. For Payne (2000) there are customer markets but also internal, referral, influencer, recruitment and supplier and alliance markets. The key to this success is value creation where supplier and customer both create value that comes from access to technology, markets or information to then provide sustainable competitive advantage. For Sharma and Sheth (1997) there are three domains of value creation: supplier partnering that involves, for example, understanding suppliers as customers, supplier performance and classifying them into groups; alliance partnering that brings parties together through for example selling and sales as with distributors; and finally there is customer partnering that involves for example networks or joint New Product Development programmes.

The importance of time

Relationship marketing is conducted over time and is not a one-off transaction but is about repeat business. There are many definitions of relationship marketing to be found in the literature but fundamentally all exchanges involve relationships. Advocates of the relationship approach maintain that sellers should seek long term relationships. Sharma and Sheth (1997) suggest that research indicates that relationship marketing encompasses a number of constructs and give the examples of relational marketing, internal marketing, symbiotic marketing, working partnerships, co-marketing alliances, long term orientation or long term relationships.

Despite the fact that relationships have existed for a very long time, in academic circles the debate goes on. Sharma and Sheth (1997:87) claim that ‘academic research is undergoing a paradigm shift from transactional marketing to relationship marketing’. On the other hand Palmer (2005) is critical of the amount of empirical work in the area and that the ‘paradigm shift’ from marketing to relationship marketing is not yet demonstrated in practice. Palmer offers five theoretical propositions based on a case study of Du Pont. These involve the market leader driving change in marketing practice that will be effectively realised where the business unit has control of the main business functions. Here the perceived abuse of power will be diminished as personal relationships, mutual trust and commitment develop, but this can only happen where internal consistency between functions exists. Change in managerial focus and marketing fundamentals can then follow and be sustained and be successful in Palmer’s view.

Market segmentation

For Piercy (1999) the underlying issue is market segmentation whereby the trick will be to devise and develop marketing strategies to match different customer relationship needs i.e. segment customer markets by customer relationship-seeking (one of four types, the others being relationship exploiters, loyal buyers and arms-length transaction buyers) characteristics. This would appear to be more relevant to BtoB marketing. As Piercy suggests, in order to develop a relationship marketing strategy marketers do need to know more about situations and characteristics of customers. For Barnes (1995), the concept is applied too broadly and as a result there are futile attempts to build relationships resulting in wasted resources. To avoid this, the marketer should, in Barnes' (1995) view, include in the relationship strategy development:

1. An assessment of how pertinent relationship dimensions or characteristics are to a customer.
2. An understanding of how a customer views his interaction with a specific company.
3. A detailed understanding of how the customer engages in the interaction or how the interaction is characterised by the customer.

(Barnes, 1995:115)

Barnes is therefore an advocate of research to confirm that different customers want different relationships and assumes that various types do exist in a segmented market. The research then is based on relationships rather than the usual need when researching the market. Barnes adds that

> "It must be considered ironic by some, but there is much to be learned in this field from the experience of many small, local businesses which have been (possibly unwittingly) practicing relationship marketing for many years".
> (Barnes, 1995:116)

Business-to-business relational exchange

Newman, Lings and Lee (2004) explore business-to-business relational exchange (B2BRE), identifying five key dimensions of communication:

- Establishment of 'special status' between parties and reduce conflict via personal communications.
- Understanding of the relationship where the notions of shared norms and shared values are matched.
- Commitment, where affective commitment can impact in positive and negative ways, as with friendships or informality.
- Trust viewed as absolutely key and fundamental to relationships.
- Power symmetry where power is viewed as unhealthy, scheming or exploitative.

(Newman, Lings and Lee, 2004:5-7)

These authors add to this the importance of personal interaction in business relationships. In particular they challenge the notion of affective commitment, which can in their view be negative in certain circumstances and can lead to an exit from the relationship by at least one of the partners. Personal interaction, especially face-to-face meetings, is fundamental to the development of affective commitment and strong personal relationships with customers and suppliers should be built, in this view.

The shift to relationship marketing

The shift to relationship marketing can be seen in research and writing of the early to mid-1990s, for example Morgan and Hunt (1994), Gronroos (1994a) or Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995). Sharma and Sheth (1997) provide an agenda for relational marketing research based on Morgan and Hunt but also other relational marketing research that had gone before. The eight categories of research are:

- Relational contracting (McNeil, 1980)
- Internal marketing (Arntd, 1983, Berry and Parasuramani, 1993)

- Symbiotic marketing (Varadrajan and Rajaratnam, 1986)
- Relationship marketing (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987)
- Strategic alliances (Day, 1990)
- Working partnerships (Anderson and Narus, 1990)
- Co-marketing alliances (Bucklin and Sengupta, 1993)
- Long term orientation (Ganesan, 1994)

(Sharma and Sheth, 1997:87)

It can be argued on the industrial or BtoB side of things that relational market exchanges occurred in the context of high interdependencies but that in any case the

> "scientific attention for the subject mainly emerged within the fields of industrial and channel marketing, trying to explain horizontal and vertical trade relationships"

(De Wulf and Odekerken-Schroder, 2001:73)

Key account management suggests that relationships are complex and SMEs are used to this (Harden, 2004). Relationship friendliness in exchange (De Wulf and Odekerken-Schtoder, 2001) requires other theory such as microeconomic theory because the Relationship Marketing paradigm is not well enough defined.

Trust, commitment and loyalty

Trust, commitment and loyalty remain key issues in relationship marketing generally but in consumer terms in particular and in recent years interest in this area has grown. There is interest in relationship quality that stems from trust and the high degree of certainty of predictable and obligatory behaviour that leads to sales, giving the seller integrity and the process a high degree of certainty (Crosby, Evans and Cowles, 1990). The process proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1994) is central i.e. that trust leads to commitment which leads to loyalty and that this is essential for successful relationship marketing. What is proposed is that this process is transposed from its beginnings in industrial/business-to-business marketing to the consumer/brand relationship, thus the brand inspires the same degree of relationship quality that is usual in human relationships. This trust in brands requires investment that carries with it some degree of risk that consumers will cease to co-operate and cease resisting attractive alternatives. Trust within the consumer/brand context has not been adequately explored and lacks suitable definitions and measurement (De Wulf and Odekerken-Schroder, 2001).

Loyalty to brands is rather more than the simplistic notion of repeat purchase over time. There is a much more complex notion of brand loyalty, involving frequency of usage, share of portfolio and attitudinal loyalty. There is a holistic process where trust, commitment and loyalty become part of one and the same. The evoked set or repertoire of suitable alternatives (Erhenberg, 1991) suggests that the stronger the loyalty the weaker the evoked set.

The relationship marketing condition

In a recent summation of the Relationship Marketing condition, Harker and Egan (2006:218) seem to suggest that adherence to this kind of thinking has brought with it problems. The relationship between the 4Ps Marketing Mix transactional model and Relationship Marketing has been extensions of the Ps of which ‘the guilty are many’, which is similar to the argument above but adds explicitly relational-type Ps. Since it is impossible to be comprehensive with such addtions, it would appear rather futile to make them.

The bygone age of the passive customer and the move towards keeping and maintaining customers is plausible. The question really is, is it enough to recognise this and to include managing customer relationships in a new definition of marketing, especially when just what marketing is depends upon the context and nature of the market one is dealing with? Those who cling on to the simpler customer-supplier dyad may be limiting their ability to manage well but it may also be that the holistic view expressed by relationship marketers is not as holistic as they might think. As Harker and Egan (2006) point out, the futile search for laws, regularities and predictability and for credibility by shedding the smoke and mirrors reputation some quarters of marketing have generated is not the answer. Harker and Egan (2006) see the possibilities of network theory, especially in BtoB exchanges as plausible. The characteristics of network marketing, which include being active and mutually dependent, mutual exchange with fulfilment of promises so that all party objectives are met, could well suit the SME condition and is returned to in chapter three of this thesis. Certainly, marketing cannot and does not stand alone and marketing may very well be the integrating force within the business and therefore more organic than mechanistic.

Critical marketing - Postmodern marketing

The basic nature of postmodernism

Postmodernism clearly predates postmodern marketing but the last 12 years or so has seen the dissemination of much writing on the subject. Postmodernism has had a major impact, especially in the arts and architecture, since about the beginning of the 1950s. Fundamentally postmodernism is a reaction to modernism where experience is personal and meaning can only be achieved in a subjective fashion. The pure or objective goal of the modernist, positivist is replaced by the goal of originality, the elimination of precedents, the individual experience not dictated of cultural contingency and relativity.

There are many contributors to the debate on modernism, postmodernism, postmodernity and the many other alternative or associated terms that are used in the literature. For Hassan (2001:2) postmodernism is about ‘fragments, hybridity, relativism, play, parody, pastiche, an ironic anti-ideological stance, an ethos bordering on kitsch and camp’. This is a context for, if not a definition of, postmodernism. Postmodernity for Hassan refers to a world process, global yet not identical everywhere so that while postmodernism (the cultural phenomenon) applies to affluent, high-tech consumer, media-driven societies, postmodernity (the inclusive geographical process) refers to an interactive, planetary phenomenon:

> “wherein tribalism and imperialism, myth and technology, margins and centre – these terms are not parallel – play out their conflictual energies, often on the Internet”.
>
> Hassan (2001:2-3)

Another influential writer is Lyotard. In his 1979 essay on the postmodern condition and knowledge, Lyotard has a number of concerns around knowledge in computerised societies, the problem of legitimisation, language and the nature of the social bond in terms of both modernism and postmodernism. Lyotard too is concerned with globalisation, consumerism and the fragmentation of authority and knowledge as a commodity:

"It is not hard to visualise learning circulating along the same lines as money, instead of for its educational value or political (administrative, diplomatic, military) importance, the pertinent distinction would no longer be between knowledge and ignorance, but rather, as is the case with money, between 'payment knowledge' and 'investment knowledge – in other words between units of knowledge exchanged in a daily maintenance framework (the reconstitution of the work force, 'survival') versus funds of knowledge dedicated to optimising the performance of a project."

Lyotard (1979:4)

The postmodern marketing condition

In the era of postmodern culture, people reject the old for the new, the old universal stories and paradigms of religion, political systems and other artefacts that have defined culture and behaviour for replacements that are better models that fit the new conditions. As mentioned earlier Hetrick and Lazoda (1999:168) suggest that postmodernism is marketing anti-theory and use the French philosopher and sociologist Baudrillard's (1983) concept of hyperreality to illustrate the move from critique of the political economy to that of 'images, commodity signs and media spectacles'. They suggest that traditional marketing management had the

> "ability to frame and manipulate discursive formulations. Certain power/knowledge relationships have developed that asymmetrically benefit society's traditional elite".

(Hetrick and Lazoda, 1999:169).

For Hetrick and Lazoda (after Foucault, the French philosopher and historian) those who control production or have the most buying power, those who construct and determine what is beautiful and attractive and decide what is good and ought to be done, excluded and marginalised groups such as women or those of a particular sexual orientation. Postmodernism leaned toward these groups and for Hetrick and Lazoda (1999:170) a ‘multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies’ was the result. There is a suggestion that new social movements such as ecology and anti-institutional resistances combined in a ‘romance of the marginal’ achieved through ‘disidentification’ and therefore there is a need to see beyond the individual as ‘eyeless, mute objects’ and recognise subjectivity independent of the role of consumer (Hetrick and Lazoda, 1999:170). For these authors postmodernism celebrates things like spectacle, and difference.

Combining the work of Firat and Ventakesh (1995) with that of Arias and Acebron (2001), the postmodern marketing condition can be illuminated by considering the following elements:

- The axial principle – the centrality of theoretical knowledge as a source of innovation and political formation. New, improved ways of doing things but where more and more innovations are not based on the physical emptiness of paper and pencil theoretical models but on revolutionary theoretical views of nature and society rather than refinements of that which exists.
- The reorganisation of work structures - the rise of the professional and technical class and the decline of manual labour that is more concept-based than matter based.
- Orientation towards the future - through technology and a new intellectual technology for decision making such as email and video conferencing. This can be a self-fulfilling prophesy since, as we engage, we provide the content that makes these tools valuable.

- The move from the production of goods to that of services, where brands no longer simply project images - they are the whole package and are pervasive.
- Juxtaposition of opposites – whereby there are increasingly imaginative ways of engaging with the consumer. Opposites becoming simultaneously possible where it is only a matter of time before a decision considered right becomes right and vice versa and where organisations can simultaneously be providers, clients and partners, where there is no clear line of distinction or demarcation.
- Tribes replace social classes – class as determined by birth is less and less relevant but what is important are the groups or tribes as defined by interests, preferences and lifestyles.
- The transformation of value systems – where there is no right way of conducting business.
- Fashion – where concentration of resources around the latest fad can make it a reality.
- Fragmentation – away from bureaucratic and hierarchically structured firms towards the management of relationships.
- De-differentiation – the loosing or blurring of borders towards strategic alliances, joint ventures and changing marketing and distribution systems. Reversed production and consumption where interactive consumers are loyal to themselves and not producers. These are decentred subjects where the individual as target is problematic, not in the sense of reaching the individual but the complexity of competing contexts makes it difficult to capture these unpredictable targets.
- Hyper-reality – where fantasy fuses with reality but where the ‘dream’ has to ‘materialise’ at some point. This might involve cyberspace and other virtual worlds.
- Chronology – the importance of time and especially just-in-time systems and the use of time as an instrument of negotiation and of evaluation of business relationships.

- Anti-fundationalism – the interest in green marketing, anti-consumption and interest in sustainable development and its relationship with radical innovation and progress.
- Fragmentation of channels, media and targets where disorder and chaos mean that markets are more and more volatile, change is everywhere and higher levels of risk have to be expected since levels of uncertainty are higher. This requires flexibility, adaptability, ability to think fast, width of experience and depth of understanding of complex problems in a chaotic environment.
- Pastiche – includes irony, parody and imitation that can be used by management to cope with the above described disorder and chaos where width, not length, of experience is required to deal with shifting multiple realities.

It is easy to see from these elements or components why marketers would want to seize on postmodernism in terms of marketing. Against the backdrop of the mantra marketing as science, Brown's (1995b) notion that marketing should be judged by appropriately aesthetic criteria since it is an art not a science is understandable. Early in Brown's work (Brown, 1993b) there is a telling reference to the core of this matter. Brown's discussion brings in marketing as a profession and as such needing more than a descriptive ethos i.e. more endeavour on the analytical side of things. There is nothing wrong with that but there were of course academics presumably seeking, even then, to elevate their own status by suggesting marketing should follow some sort of scientific code by setting up testable hypotheses, advocating discriminate fact gathering and generally getting systematic to attain such a status. This is perhaps best summed up by O'Shaughnessy (1995), who describes marketing as having a vain obsession with mechanistic approaches and beliefs in laws.

Brown (1995a) seems to have sewn up the postmodern condition as applied to marketing, with his central attack on the positivism of modernism, just at a time when public sector managers were trying to adopt these very modernist approaches. This included the formation of marketing departments and positions at the very time when commercial organizations were dropping such structures/strictures (Gronroos, 1994). Brown (1993b) points out that modernist marketing, born of capitalism, is essentially deterministic, prescriptive and therefore of dubious benefit in today's turbulent and chaotic marketplace. The implications of this stance are enormous. For example when the links are made between the arts and tourism it becomes obvious that the type of research and analysis is crucial to our understanding of complex situations such as the arts (Copley and Robson, 2001). The public sector seems to depend on marketing but what is missing from the picture is a detailed understanding of what marketing is in reality and how this relates to the aspirations of practitioners.

Marketing seems to appear in the thoughts and writings of many commentators as with for example ethics and advertising practice. For writers such as Firat and Venkatesh, 1993, Brown, 1993a, 1995a, 2000, and Cova, 1996, marketing has been the epitome of the postmodern condition and the ultimate postmodern practice. This is why some marketing writers propose that marketing, as a management discipline, will be the first to adopt postmodernism, but this is not to say that marketing practitioners will. For example picking up what postmodernists talk about most, consumption, this is not merely a mirror of production but involves a system of objects and exchange items that are signs (Saren, 2000). As Saren points out, postmodern theory is an oxymoron and is therefore unlikely to be capable of providing a general theory of marketing.

Having generated so much interest in postmodern marketing during the 1990s (Brown 1993a, 1993b, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1998), by 2000 Brown was admitting to having created his own brand of postmodern marketing (PMM) that ‘is just one of many conceptual brands on the well-stocked shelves of the scholarly supermarket’ (Brown, 2000:284). Perhaps, suggests Brown, that for some PMM is a prestigious intellectual label like Versace or for others it cuts a swathe through anthropology, sociology and history. Brown refuses consistently to define PMM but contends that postmodernism is itself is a crisis representation of anything from theories and methods to modes of discourse. The modernist, orthodox marketing models in postmodern terms are overly simplistic, reductive, static and the ‘Ps’ passé, ‘generic strategies geriatric and matrices cease to mesmerise’ (Brown, 2000:284). Brown suggests that marketing should look toward finding out what people do not want and giving them less unacceptable alternatives. This suggests there are methodological implications and alternative marketing research usage to enable understanding of consumption phenomena i.e. despite a refusal to define PMM Brown seems to suggest an alternative marketing concept that determines what customers do not need or want and then cutting this out of the picture rather than seeking to understand needs and wants and trying to satisfy them as per the orthodox marketing concept championed by writers of the orthodox marketing persuasion. Brown's work may be better seen as catalyst rather than a bridge between modernity and postmodernity. Glenn Morgan (2003:119) is more cynical of in particular Brown's postmodern marketing which Glenn Morgan sees as 'a critique without substance that is all about style and very little about content'. Glenn Morgan recognises Brown and others' ability to shock the orthodox marketing establishment but feels that it:

> "ultimately lacks any purpose beyond its own local struggle to broaden the discipline of marketing. Any critique of 'society' or the social consequences of markets, marketing and mass consumption is lost in the celebration of diversity and the 'magicality' of the experience, undergone by the disembodied asocial selves who immerse themselves in the carnival of the market".
>
> (Morgan, 2003:119)

Critical marketing – Critical Theory

Nature

Current Critical Theory has its roots in the Frankfurt School where the prime interest was at a societal level. Needs that people think they have give rise to 'commodity fetishism' (Glenn Morgan, 2003:121). This and the antecedents of the Critical Theorists in more recent times are discussed in more detail in the next chapter in terms of the professional power of managers where emphasis is placed on power and the effects of knowledge (Glenn Morgan, 1992). This thesis has, in terms of critical studies, only included Critical Theory and Postmodernism. It might well have included other critical studies such as feminism but this is beyond the scope of this thesis. Critical Theory has, for Bronner, (1993:1):

"invaded the most prestigious academic journals in disciplines ranging from anthropology and film to religion, linguistics and political science. In fact, given the new stratum of technical experts and intellectuals concerned with normative and empirical disputation, it has arguably become a feature of the very society its proponents ostensibly challenged".

Critical Theory, society and reflection

The uniqueness of Critical Theory is in its emancipatory imperative, no matter what form of expression it takes outside of its classical formulation. Critical Theory in its original conception was not a system nor was it reductionist in its orientation. In fact it was the antithesis of this, with the Essay being deliberately used as an anti-systemic device to promote reflexivity. Critical Theory is associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research that spawned a set of unorthodox thinkers who were more or less left-wing communists representing Western Marxism. The Frankfurt School of thought centred around consciousness and alienation, interpreting ideology as a lived experience and looking to the re-establishment of the connection between theory and practice. The original Frankfurt School intent was that a critical theory should be 'explanatory, practical and normative, all at the same time'. It must therefore be able to identify the problem with the current social reality and actors needed to change it and 'provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation' (Bohman, 2005:1-2).

Horkheimer, director of the Institute by 1930, was responsible for the term Critical Theory and the use of the Journal for Social Research as a forum and weapon against any fixed system. After the Second World War it would be Adorno with Horkheimer who would eventually become appalled at radicalism in theory becoming conservative in practice (Bronner, 1993). Deeper realities and structures in society had been recognised by, for example Marcuse (1964) and Habermas (1971). Marcuse's 'One Dimensionality' had attacked the superficiality of the pleasures of consumerism (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:76). Marcuse eventually became disillusioned with the counter-culture and 'flower power' of the 1960s but remained optimistic with the spawning of the movements of for example 'peace, gays, feminist and environmentalists' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:71). This was against the negative features of modern techno-capitalist society. Habermas was in agreement with Marcuse as an optimist (as opposed to the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer) and also against the dominance of technocracy over the lifeworld of the citizen (Bronner, 1993).

Critical Theory in its original form and intent had by this time reached its zenith. Never-the-less the 'Dialectics of the enlightenment' had seen Horkheimer and Adorno challenge the idea of science as a benevolent agent where people were trapped in the scientist nexus with the relentless attempts to dominate nature (Bronner, 1993:5). Thus the role for Critical Theory in the domination-emancipation struggle, involving science as ideology, is clear. Mass consumerism as dehumanising and repressive has its counter in Critical Theory as emancipator. Marcusian consumers are passive, unreflective and dominated. For Habermas (after Weber) science should not take over values and ethics and technology should be part of individual and societal development not dominators of it (Bronner, 1993). Alvesson and Willmott (1996:17) sum up the role of Critical Theory in the societal sense as being:

'to foster a rational democratic development of modern institutions in which self-reflective, autonomous and responsible citizens become progressively less dependent upon …understanding of their needs and are less entranced by the apparent …inevitability of the prevailing order. To this end, Critical Theory encourages the questioning of ends as well as their preferred means'.

(Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:17)

For Glenn Morgan (1996) it is the promotion of self-expression that leads to false consumers and the generation of new anxieties through the creation of false needs. Big business is therefore at the helm of pop as opposed to avant-guard culture, the source of many postmodern social analyses.

The Hidden Persuaders

There was the 1950s and 1960s scepticism from the likes of economist J K Galbraith and consumerist Ralph Nader, and the more specific critique of marketing and advertising by, for example, Vance Packard, (Packard, 1957). The embryonic consumer movement and the idea that marketers worked on the side of producers not consumers was somewhat thwarted by the likes of Philip Kotler (as for example in

Kotler and Zaltman, 1969) extending the Marketing Concept into other planes. The Societal Marketing Concept became the fifth era, thus legitimising marketing as a whole in a very plausible way.

Packard (1957), in The Hidden Persuaders, had provided a critique of advertising and marketing in the 1950s, arguing that big companies through the power of advertising could shape consumers to the benefit of those companies. Even today marketing commentators still maintain that through branding everyone is a winner. There are some voices still that have a counter argument such as Naomi Kline (2000) with her Vance Packard-like attack on the power of the big corporations to manipulate with images. Like Packard, Kline's concern is a societal one and takes an anti-globalisation stance in the interests of fairness and her culture jamming ideas have taken hold. As Glenn Morgan (2003) points out, this is an attempt to suggest that consumers can be more proactive and become aware and politically conscious in what they buy. For Glenn Morgan (2003:113) the orthodox marketing position is problematic and

'the discourse is seductive; it is closely tied to the language of choice and freedom which comes from market provision instead of provision which is administered by the state or by professionals'.

(Glenn Morgan, 2003:113)

Not surprisingly, marketing as a practice has at times been subsumed into the centre of political and economic debates on freedom to choose, the role of the state and state intervention with opposing economists J K Galbraith in one corner and Milton Freidmann in the other. However, for Glenn Morgan all parties seem to accept or cling to the ideal of the market as developed by Adam Smith and the market only fails when something murky happens within marketing communications. The essence of Critical Theory in this area is, for Glenn Morgan (2003), to provide another approach with a focus on how needs are socially constructed. The rise of 'commodity fetishism' (Glenn Morgan, 2003:121), as suggested above, meant that on the surface people might be persuaded to buy things through the power of marketing but especially advertising. However, the problem is deeper 'where identity, status and subjectivity are intertwined with the purchase of goods and services on the market' (Glenn Morgan, 2003:121). So herein lies the old argument that marketing generally but advertising, branding and other tools and techniques serve only to identify, anticipate and satisfy needs and wants effectively – in the orthodox marketing manner, and even those needs and wants consumers never new they had until persuaded otherwise.

The marketing concept is contextually bound

By the 1980s and 1990s social scientists' interest in consumption and cultural studies issues led, according to Burton (2001) to European thinking in terms of relationship and postmodern marketing but also Critical Theory. Burton describes what appears to have been a seminal appearance and presentation on Marx to Foucault and Critical Theory at the American Marketing Association in 1987 by Poster and Vankatesh. The recognition that the orthodox marketing concept is contextually bound i.e. to the American industrial system so that the transference in terms of validity of marketing concepts 'across time and space are extremely limited' (Burton, 2001:723). The dominance of the 'science of administration', partly supported by the academic tenure system, meant that the 'aim of management teaching is to train future managers and not critique existing systems and values' (Burton, 2001:724) kind of attitude left it to the Europeans to advocate a Critical Theory approach to marketing.

The need for theory in marketing

The 'borderless, connected knowledge economy' has meant changes in marketing practices and 'fundamental theoretical shifts in marketing'. Certainly the 'dominant marketing mix paradigm was found inadequate in incorporating these theoretical shifts and this has led to the relationship marketing paradigm' (Thomas and Gupta, 2005:95). It would seem to be a fool's errand to try to claim marketing as science. There may be lots of concepts or propositions but for many this does not mean science. Gronroos (2006:395), is also concerned about the 4Ps but more broadly suggests that marketing 'cannot be treated as an organisational function only' as the American Marketing Association appear to be doing and so comes through with an alternative definition that involves 'promises' (Gronroos, 2006:407). This highlights the continual shifts and changes that face businesses and other organisations over time and the need for marketing theory and practice to at least keep pace with change.

Saren (2000) concludes that marketing's ontology involves no one theory or method and its epistemology involves the Kuhnian 'competing paradigms' argument, for example the theory of consumer behaviour versus the theory of the firm. Saren comments that critical relativism is the only viable proposition, one that rejects scientific method but accepts the possibility of pre-existing reality. There is the question that perceptions may be illusions, that state of being may be reduced to knowledge and vice versa leading Saren to conclude that we 'need to be able to know more about reality beyond one's own existence' (2000:24) and suggests that a lack of attention to history, too much attention to quantitative methods and lack of impact on practice have been barriers to marketing improvement. Saren adds these to the American Marketing Association task force of 1984 barriers, which are: resources; not enough knowledge; research tenure problems; failure of senior faculty to develop; restrictions against practical and innovative and long term projects; and limited dissemination of knowledge (Saren, 2000:24). Saren highlights what knowledge does in the Foucauldian 'synonymity' sense of 'doing in the world being entwined with knowing the world'. Theory, for Saren helps create the knowledge that facilitates power but knowledge needs order, hence the idea of a knowledge community where the nature of knowledge may inevitably change in terms of its 'PLC' and 'shelf life'. This, of course, does not necessarily mean a scientific community. In marketing this has meant new ideas or 'ways of seeing' (and not necessarily new paradigms) concepts or propositions such as segmentation or quality. Saren, however, sees relationship marketing as having 'by far the best prospects for providing the basis for a new theory of marketing' (Saren, 2000:37).

Critical Theory is not a single, unified theory but broadly it can be said within Critical Theory the functional approach is rejected in favour of approaches that demystify the ideological basis of social relations and emphasise the importance of self-reflexivity. In general marketing terms Critical Theory allows us to supersede the 'strong and perverse adherence to the basic logical empiricist thought' (Burton, 2001:726). Burton (2001:726) suggests that the dominant orthodox form has marginalised many other theoretical perspectives and there is a need for a good mix of theory that should 'take precedence over arguing about research methodology'.

Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the views put forward in the literature as to the nature of marketing and the various marketing discourses, concepts, paradigms or philosophical stances that are extant. The three immediate and obvious ways of seeing marketing - modernist (orthodox) marketing, relational marketing and critical marketing (postmodern marketing and Critical Theory) have been reviewed and work in these fields interpreted. The next chapter discusses traditional management and the impact of critical approaches to management. It also considers the SME marketing context.

CHAPTER THREE – MANAGEMENT, MARKETING AND THE SME CONTEXT

Introduction

Management in context

Marketing in a specified context is at the heart of this thesis. Since there is no single, universal way to manage, there is a need to look at management from within the specific context where it takes place. Various orientations of international business, especially from the eighteenth century until present day, have been profoundly influenced by the cult of progress, i.e., the progress of reason and science in modernism as argued by the likes of Marx, Freud and Dewey that rejects the existence of universal, unchanging truth and is therefore hostile to Christian orthodoxy. Put another way, truths change with the times. It might be argued that 'Christian Liberalism is not really a form of Christianity but a subset of modernism with a Christian veneer' (Hutchinson, 2005:2).

This has inhibited the West in terms of the ability to view others, especially developing nations, in broad, non-ethnocentric ways (Weir, 1999 after Walle, 1989). By the 1970s the European approach to management development and education could be seen to be more social democrat in practice and philosophy than its American counterpart making it more diverse (Weir, 1999). Weir provides a useful ancestry of management from the American System of the 1950s, concluding that:

"Perhaps the Anglo-American paradigm has never been thoroughly challenged at the theoretical level. Perhaps its main function as a basis of a belief system explains the otherwise amazing success of such partially empirically supported panaceas as in search of excellence or business process re-engineering".

(Weir, 1999: 65).

This is, in part, of course a reference to Peters and Waterman (1982). The then McKinsey and Company consultants developed eight basic principles of management from a study of forty three successful American companies that became seen as the art of American management. These eight themes are ‘eight attributes of excellence’ (Braun, 1984:1), which form the basis of the chapters of the 1982 book ‘In Search of Excellence’. The themes include: ‘a bias for action’ (active decision making, getting on with things), ‘get close to the customer’ (learning from customers of the business) and ‘stick to the knitting’ (stay with the business that you know) (Braun, 1984:1-2). At the centre of this are people, customers and action. In particular, Peters wanted to release business from what he called the tyranny of the bean counters and show how crucial people could be. This was a reaction against the Scientific Management of Taylor and its adherents, but also to the success of the Japanese.

The idea of rewarding and motivating employees was not new, but in Japanese terms this was about positive reinforcement rather like a parent would treat a child (Morgan, 1997). The key was to turn soft factors into hard ones. But despite Peters’ loyalty to the eight themes right up until 2001, the central flaw is seen in the suggestion that these eight points or themes would apply forever. Peters suggests that he would keep these and add to them in terms of capabilities concerning ideas, liberation and speed (Chapman, 2005).

The aim of this chapter

The aim of this chapter is to report on marketing practice in the chosen context, against marketing practice that has been shaped by dominant modernist marketing orthodoxy, originally driven by the American Management Paradigm that is essentially positivist in its outlook. There is a need to look at (often fragmented) organisational culture and its ethos in terms of social processes, images, symbols and rituals. Therefore, the chapter also considers the impact of Critical Theory on management generally and on marketing and its management in particular. There is also consideration of the nature of marketing in SMEs and the particular context chosen as a focus of this thesis, that of BtoB SMEs.

The objectives of this chapter

Part of the research question in this thesis involves the place, if any, for Critical Theory. This chapter, therefore, has three key objectives. Firstly, it seeks to show the nature of management and explore the relevance of the traditional management paradigm to current management practice. Secondly, it seeks to explore the work of Critical Theory and any impact on management practice. Thirdly, it seeks to explain the nature of marketing in SMEs (including marketing and entrepreneurship) and within the chosen SME context.

The nature of management

This chapter argues that a contextual understanding is required in order that a fuller grasp of theories underpinning management and marketing practice can be had. If management problem solving is problematic in large companies and corporations, and it is challenging even within these to gain acceptance of new and truly radical approaches to management, then it is worth considering whether this is even more so in the SME context. On the other hand, because of the very nature and characteristics of SMEs, there may be a better chance of gaining acceptance of new and radical approaches to management and management problem-solving.

The nature of management for Tsoukas (1994) means that it has many dimensions including: control (pursuance of the organizational goals); cooperation (through reward that is either or both material or symbolic); and adding value to inert resources (involving leadership and motivation of others, people being a resource). These can be deemed to be causal within the economic and political system where they have influence. However, the system itself influences the way this is conducted.

The nature of management paradigms

There has been a move away from the assumption that management has to be done in the 'American Way', i.e., management takes place within a system or paradigm and is, therefore, not universally the same in all systems or paradigms. The reason often given for taking a paradigmatic view of management is that it helps to see an internal cohesion of models and theories within a discipline that is distinctive. However, the word 'paradigm' itself is not without controversy since its popularisation in the 1970's in Thomas Kuhn's (1971) book 'The Structure of Scientific Revolutions', as discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. Any discussion of this kind is beyond the scope and purpose of this thesis, but the paradigm approach is thought useful in the sense that there are in the literature broad, identifiable paradigms from around the world.

It is questionable whether traditional management methods and structures can

"adequately accommodate a complexity-based worldview, which is characterised by discontinuous change, hyper competition and the exponential explosion of information science"

(Murphy, 2005:1).

Murphy (2005) adds that the management of Taylor (scientific management, 1911), Drucker (management and leadership, 1954), Fayol (administrative management principles, 1916) Weber (economy and society, 1914) and other 19th and 20th centuries management creations are more suited to that time when things were slower, competition less aggressive and the time was characterised by long periods of stability making the structures now overly simplistic. Zachariev (2002) adds Follet (human relations, 1918) to the list of luminaries. Now we have a 'borderless connected and wired world' (Murphy, 2005:1). The question is what kind of paradigm should there be for management? Camillus (1997:1) suggests that 'current turbulence means traditional models of strategic management have to give way to alternative explanations', i.e., there is 'massive discontinuous change both internal and external to the company'. Zachariev (2002:15) comments that the 'challenges of the 21st century are connected to the technological revolution and global market economy with the transformation of the economic and competitive landscape'.

The traditional management paradigm and beyond

The Industrial Revolution was the start of the development of many of the management tools still used today whether this be Porter's (1980) 'five forces' framework, the Harvard Business School's SWOT model or the Boston Consulting Group's Growth/Share Matrix and many more (Murphy, 2005). Industrial Organisation Theory provided the analytical foundation for many issues in strategic management and economic policy and was itself based on neoclassical micro-economics with roots back into the 1800s (Murphy, 2005). Murphy makes the link between early science and management science and to management theories such as those of Porter (1980) and is based on man and companies being rational. Murphy identifies several trends that emerged by the 1980s; globalisation, reduced technology cycles, shifting demographics, changing expectations among workers, consumers and customers, restructuring of capital markets, exponential expansion of technology and computer networks, rapid advances in science, and the dismantling of hierarchies (Murphy, 2005:3). Morgan (1997:121) suggests that there is such a thing as industrial culture where 'we can thus say that people working in factories in Detroit, Moscow, Liverpool, Paris, Tokyo and Toronto all believe in the same industrial culture' and we can talk of 'the culture of industrial society not societies'.

Culture as a source of organisational change is key since it is an 'important force that holds organisations in a given form over time' and this is probably the reason why so many writers have seen it as an obstacle to change (Feldman, 1996:128), where ultimately behaviour has to change. Organisational culture can be 'both an obstacle to change and a ground for creative development' (Linstead, 1999:87). It is not the intension here to dwell on organisational culture. This is briefly returned to in terms of metaphor a little later in this chapter with regard to the organisation as culture as one of Morgan's (1997) metaphors. However, the consequences of these trends are that information systems have lowered unit costs and brought higher productivity.

Sheer size is no longer the order of the day in a world of fast-moving, flexible and smaller organisations. Experience is no longer the competitive advantage tool it once was. Add to this the more aware customer and consumer and, in the information age, there truly is a new set of consequences. Traditional management, it is therefore argued, fails to cope with the changes in work practices, new leadership and management challenges. Smits (2001:2) suggests the world is less predictable and that ‘business organisations are experiencing even more complex times’. Smits distinguishes between adaptability (‘that describing state of an organisation, naturally adapting to its environment’) and an organisation ‘that is constantly re-inventing itself with large, expensive change programmes’ (Smits, 2001:2). Smits links the organisation’s identity to its change capability.

Organisations without boundaries and the demise of command and control

On a practical level technology has brought the organisation without boundaries forward where departments disappear and empowerment teams take over (Murphy, 2005). Boundaries are removed both vertically (hierarchy) and horizontally, i.e., flattened, and with no boundaries there is ‘decreased dependence on command-and-control style of leadership’, but there is a ‘commitment to virtual technologies’ where interaction occurs electronically and out of mutual interest rather than authority. This has led to new organisational forms including the virtual organisation with outsourcing predominant – telecommuting, temps, ad hoc project teams, independent agents, teleconferencing, website based training, email, voicemail, and paging (Murphy, 2005:3). Camillus (1997:1) describes the ‘transformational paradigm’ as ‘proactive and well suited to bridge discontinuities’. Problems arise around these developments, for example job satisfaction or productivity. Freeing managers and workers from alienating forms of work and empowering people is seen by Alvesson and Willmott (1996:162) as part of the ‘humanist movement’, where command and control is overtaken by empower and facilitate.

Mechanistic organisations

In practice this would mean redesigning work to provide opportunities generally, but for self-determination and reflection. Flexibility is required to improve productivity and decrease management overheads (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). In a similar vein Golding (1996:51) raises the problem of morale and suggests a need to 'talk in terms of happiness, commitment and satisfaction at work'. Economies of scale and specialisation play a role but it is the transforming of control into motivation of the workforce to reverse negative connotations that is of greater import. Organisations that do not do this often perpetuate the myth that control is necessary for success and often cite competitive threat in support of this stance. Organisations are clearly capable of being this latter type and these are said by some to be dangerous places to work in and 'the ugly face' of organisational life (for example Morgan, 1997:302, after former British Prime Minister Edward Heath). The metaphor of organisations as instruments of domination is another of Morgan's (1997) metaphors discussed briefly, later in this chapter. Wheatley (1997:1) sees that organisational change is required and 'we still think of organisations in mechanistic terms, as collections of replaceable parts capable of being reengineered' where we engaged with a 'metamorphic myth' (Wheatley, 1997:1). This promotes the idea of prediction and control where leaders are expected to provide everything that was missing from the machine, i.e., 'vision, inspiration, intelligence and courage' (Wheatley, 1997:1). In other words, encourage enthusiasm and avoid scepticism (Heskett, 2006) through self-management. This, of course is the opposite of the command and control manager where 'if you can ask not tell, engage with people in learning conversations, coach, develop…you will probably be thrilled with the result' (Heskett, 2006:1). Wheatley (1997:2) argues that management has tried to control but 'we never effectively control people with these systems, but we certainly stop a lot of good work from getting done'.

For Murphy (2005) relationships and information flow are of high importance in a world of chaos and change. The workplace needs to be energised but within conditions that are conducive to trust, belief and self organisation, not dictated from above, in order to provide a deep sense of connection to what the organisation is trying to achieve. Therefore open and honest identity that shows up in the organisation's vision and feeds through to customers is required. This suggests a relational approach to managing. For Wheatley (1997:7) 'Commitment and loyalty are essential in human relationships'. Murphy (2005, after Voss, 1996) speculates on the likely characteristics of the virtual organisation, suggesting that a shared vision and core competencies drive activities while teamwork implements activities in a holistic approach. Networking for coordinated actions based on faster decision making will distribute information in real time. Bottom up delegation will achieve economies of scale even when new conditions arise or specific competencies are required. For Murphy (2005:5) these highlight 'the fact that the golden threads that run through a virtual organisation centre on vision, core competencies and speed of delivery'.

Organic organisations

An alternative to the machine is the organism or living thing that changes all of the time. Wheatley (1997) argues that the primary task of being a leader is to make sure the organisation knows itself. Wheatley (1997:4) suggests that 'it is a strange and promising paradox of living systems: Clarity about who we are as a group creates freedom for individual contributions'. The contribution to which Wheatley refers is the response the organisation makes continuously 'to shifts in markets and environments' where 'we will have honoured their innate capacity for self-organisation. And they will respond with the initiative and creativity that is found only in life, never machines' (Wheatley, 1997:7). In a similar fashion Smits (2001:3) discusses traditional and complex management where the former is the usual, hierarchical, structure that is 'built on power, conformity and many politics that happen'. Smits argues that command and control does not work but there is a requirement for a 'different paradigm and different organisational model' (Smits, 2001:5). This requirement for Smits (2001:6) involves 'the Living Systems metaphor' where identity and self-organisation are pre-requisites. Identity, context, knowledge and connectivity allow self-organisation and 'we recognise that these deep processes allow for the structure, processes and behaviours to emerge' (Smits, 2001:6). While the machine needs rebuilding the Living Systems adapt and fundamental to this proposition is the idea of empowerment.

New realities in management for the twenty first century

Alvesson and Willmott (1996) are essentially interested in ideas that are presented as radical and revolutionary in terms of the establishment of what is really important in terms of management. They comment on the actual preoccupation with the preservation of established priorities and privileges, for example profitable growth and managerial rule. Alvesson and Willmott are critical of ideas that are dressed up in liberated and innovative language as are Copley and Robson (1996), who provide empirical research that suggests that language such as TQM and Business Process Reengineering and ideas within these areas has little to do with the rationality of contemporary management theory and practice, especially regarding fundamental values and goals.

Critical perspectives and Critical Theory

Critical Theory (CT) calls for a people-centred rather than technical approach to solving problems. CT draws attention to the dominance of technical rationality that includes objectives and goals (Levy, Alvesson and Willmott, (2003). Social science is therefore used as a basis to diagnose and address management problems with the role of reason prominent in this. There is said to be discontinuous change and hyper-competition, globalization, reduction in technology cycles, rapid scientific and technological changes (D'Aveni, 1994). Onken (1999) looked at the relationships among polychronicity, speed and firm performance. Onken suggests that most industries will become hypercompetitive where it will be impossible for a firm to sustain competitive advantage. Onken goes further to suggest that destroying or neutralising the competition and disrupting the status quo of the marketplace leads to competitive advantage:

"especially…being able to move more rapidly than other competitors in the industry …one of the factors that supports a firm's success is that of organisational culture …that can be a powerful resource to manage and could even lead to competitive advantage if it enhances the firm's performance".

(Onken, 1999:236-237)

We are now in what is increasingly being recognized as the information age where fundamental resources are knowledge and communication rather than physical labour or natural resources. Critical Theory then is about consciousness or put another way how to see and become aware of things. Critical Theory emphasises 'the role of ideas' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:59) in the foundation and reproduction of consciousness and society. This is where the potential for radical change lies. It also lies in the contradictions between forms of consciousness made by the dominant structures.

Social perspective

In this sense it is worth considering Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four paradigms from a social perspective. The first, the functionalist, has an objectivist viewpoint of subject matter, is highly pragmatic, problem-oriented and views social engineering as a basis for social change. This is knowledge-based and technical. The second, the interpretive, sees the social world as an emergent social process where social reality is a network of assumptions and inter-subjectively shared meanings. This deals with how words, symbols and gesture render the world objectively real. The third, the radical humanist, is similar to the interpretive paradigm, but emphasises the overthrowing or transcending the limitations of existing social norms or arrangements. This therefore deals with radical change theory and social order. The fourth, the radical structuralist, is similar to functionalist paradigm but has different ends, i.e., this is committed to radical change, emancipation and human potential in the context of structural conflict, modes of domination, and contradiction and deprivation of structural relationships in a realist social world. This paradigm understands social order as a product of coercion and has a focus on contradictions and consciousness rather than structures. It is in between individual and true consciousness and suggests human capacity to be creative and self-determining, which reflects the antagonism felt toward the reproduction of the status quo.

In the second and third psychology-driven paradigms reality has to be phenomenological where reality is what the beholder perceives it to be, therefore it is process rather than content that helps understand existence. The other two are driven by behavioural theory with an emphasis on objective reality. Burrell and Morgan's (1979) approach to social theory is one of making meta-assumptions about subjective or objective reality.

World views not paradigms

The four paradigms offer different perspectives on and approaches to the analysis of social phenomena. Mills (1990), in an interview with Gareth Morgan in 1990 asks about the paradigm approach. In reply Morgan states categorically that in retrospect they (Burrell and Morgan), in writing the 1979 book Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis, should not have selected Kuhn's term but rather should have used the term sociological world views and organizational analysis. Burrell and Morgan (1979**)** did not like the definition of organisation being to do with people coming together and then being rationally coordinated in pursuit of a common goal. This for Burrell and Morgan is overly simplistic, but in the end theirs is a rejection of the functionalist paradigm. Burrell may be a radical structuralist and Morgan a radical humanist, but their differences are minor compared with their agreement that it is the ontological difference that separates the functionalist from the truly interpretive, social construction theorist (Mills, 1990). Therefore, rather than the belief that people with commonalities come together with the same goal, radical humanists such as Morgan believe that revolution or transformation occurs through consciousness. Burrell as a radical structuralist takes a more realist position. Mills (1990) sums up this position as one

"that grounds social change in the antagonisms between structural relations, not consciousness at all; where consciousness is more suprastructural. Reality is not changed by the consciousness of people, but is changed by the binding together of these contradictions that will transform existing societies into new forms. That is the fundamental distinction between the radical paradigms".

(Mills, 1990:5)

However, for radical humanism consciousness is the driving force, its essence, where approaches to changes with organisation can lead to substantial changes in social life. Therefore, this is the sociology of radical change, interpretive sociology, phenomenology, solipsism, hermeneutics and anarchic individualism. There is no intention here to debate the nature of philosophies such as solipsism. That is beyond the scope and point of this thesis. The interest from the standpoint of this thesis is generally how Critical Theory might influence management and ultimately, particularly marketing management in SMEs. Reflection, reflexivity, introspection and other such expressions all contain the idea that experience can shape consciousness and are in opposition to the notion of the possession of ideas innately at birth. For Grice (1997:417) ‘The call for reflexivity within the spirit of emancipation is consistent with the theme of constantly challenging taken-for-granted or congealed reality’.

Allvesson and Wilmot (1996) do not take the feminist or poststructuralist approach but rather the radical humanist approach as discussed above. This is subjective, radical change that releases social constraints that limits human potential and is anti-organisation (and anti-traditional or orthodox management) in scope in terms of alienation of people from themselves, from nature and from others. In societal terms this would mean societies – communities – being torn apart, work socially divisive, market relations making people into commodities and people being limited spiritually and creatively. This is a kind of psychic prison that is discussed briefly as one of Morgan’s (1997) metaphors later in this chapter, with the only way out being via critical reflection and Critical Theory as the device, resource or tool to move toward a more rational society.

Critical Theory, science and management

Understanding management through institutions, for example through Taylorism as a mode of technocratic thinking in terms of the pursuit of efficiency through the ideology of domination, is one view. Critical Theory is another that offers a practical rationality and not a refinement of the technical or instrumental. Critical management ‘challenges the necessity for current boundaries and anticipates the possibility of future forms of management that transgress and redraw them’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003:10). Disillusionment with traditional forms of management theory that has led to alienation and is said to be ‘tunnel vision’ and is dangerous ‘practically and intellectually, ecologically as well as culturally' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003:11). These authors argue that technical knowledge should be subordinate to and grounded by 'the domain of praxis' and managers are urged to use science critically and reflexivity as a resource of social development.

This is the generation of knowledge and realization of human interests that 'strives to elucidate and transform' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:62). This is a different stance to Burrell and Morgan (1979) as portrayed above. Rather, according to Robinson (2005), it is connected to the view of Habermas (1989), who essentially sees the differentiation and structure of the public and private spheres as the character of modernity where action is coordinated by systems (for example the market) which function according to means-end rationality. However actions are coordinated by mediated norms and values and socially defined ends and meanings which constitute the life world. Habermas connects the production of knowledge to materially grounded arousal of cognitive interests that are self-consciously located (Robinson, 2005).

For Alvesson and Willmott (1996:65):

'Critical Theory contends that the identification and pursuit of means and ends can be more or less rational depending upon the openness symmetry of the power relations through which decisions about ends are reached. Accordingly, the development of less distorted forms of knowledge is conditional upon the removal of institutional and psychological obstacles such as patriarchy and egoism that currently impede greater openness and symmetry'

This is about enlightenment, the organisation's efficacy and 'existing institutions and ideologies' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:67).

Organisation metaphors

As discussed earlier in this thesis, metaphors of management and organisation are used to help us understand and are rooted in assumptions about the world. They transform what we do and how we think (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). There are many metaphors that can be put together to represent a life world, for example marketing as ‘needs satisfier’ as opposed to marketing as ‘manipulation’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:95) or ‘mystification’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:102). Gareth Morgan’s (1997) metaphor approach has both advantages and limitations. Favoured metaphors can trap the manager in that way of seeing. Creating ways of seeing allows for, by definition, ways of not seeing. However, for Morgan the challenge lies in becoming accomplished in using the metaphor to see, understand and shape situations. Morgan’s metaphors range from the machine (rationalise) and organism (focus on adaptation and the satisfaction of needs) to brain (focus on organisational learning), culture (values, beliefs, norms, character), politics (order, conflict management), psychic prison (by imperfect realities where there is a conscious/unconscious), flux and transformation (permanence and change) and domination (negative impact on human beings such as exploitation). Therefore for Morgan (1997:4) ‘the use of metaphor implies a way of thinking and seeing that would pervade what we understand our world in general’ to be.

The first of Morgan’s metaphors is the machine metaphor. The organization as a machine (metaphorically) is problematic on its own because it ignores human aspects and is biased. Morgan’s second metaphor is the organization as organism. Briefly comparing these first two usefully serves to illustrate Morgan’s central point that seems to be that there are many different types of organization and many ways in management. The organization as machine is exemplified by the McDonald’s ‘have a nice day’ routinised offering that fits in with the top-down management by objectives approach that is Taylorism. It ignores human factors because it uses workers as ‘servants or adjuncts to machines’ (Morgan, 1997:24). In this scenario the thinking is done by managers and this approach works where: the task is simple and straightforward; the environment is stable; the product is consistent and a mono product; precision is premium; and workers are compliant. This could apply to a number of situations such as Kwik Fit-style tyre-fitting or office ‘factories’. This is similar to Mintzberg’s (1994a) machine-like or divisionalised organisation being okay as long as tasks are simple and suitable to the production-driven organisation with the more professional, autocratic and simply structured organisation being market or environment driven. This can be efficient but cannot cope with change and relies on the team working together.

Organizations as organisms adapt to environmental conditions. In this view the organization is an open system, not closed and mechanical, with life cycles and factors that influence the health of the differing species. This is therefore a microbiology view of how organizations work as bio organisms. This involves: the satisfaction of human needs, work conditions, salaries, the job as an expression of employees life, and new technology that brings benefits but destroys fabric and can cause social problems. Management therefore involves relations between the various internal and external elements of the environment. In the turbulent environment the organisation needs a degree of internal differentiation between departments to cope. For Gareth Morgan (1997), most environments are turbulent so that the machine-like organisation would not be able to cope in most situations.

Metaphor is seen as an active and constitutive force that makes meaning. Glenn Morgan (1996:349) sees that ‘Different metaphors have a capacity to tap different dimensions of a situation, showing how different qualities can coexist’. The use of this approach therefore ‘results in the style of thinking that is always open and evolving and extremely well suited for dealing with the complexity of organisational life’.

Problem solving through being people-centred

If Alvesson and Willmott (1996) are right, problem solving can occur through being people-centred rather than technical whereby the social sciences can be harnessed to diagnose and address management problems. They therefore introduce the role of reason that goes beyond the usual consultant/manager role and contribute to the refining of means of pursuing established ends and are deployed to scrutinize the rationality of processes through which the ends themselves are determined. This is not the narrow reason that is instrumental conception, i.e., it is not TQM, Social Re-engineering or troubleshooting. Within Critical Theory mere technical problem solving is bogus or irrelevant. The basic rationale for consideration of application of Critical Theory to management is that managers are employed in diverse organisations with different jobs, specialisms and technical functions of management that do not/cannot exist in a vacuum. Such situations are not neutral because of disparities of ownership, income and opportunity and demand the exercise of control and the stimulation of effort. Organisations are seen as being social/political organisations full of problems that are not simply corrected by a technical or instrumental solution found within, for example TQM. Between managed and managers, communication can become distorted for many reasons, for example because of patriarchy. Thus as hierarchical structures are flattened the social system becomes more complex, making management a much more difficult task. The argument is that the rather simple management through technical or instrumental reason excludes exposure to ideas that could help make sense of the many pressures and contradictions of the work place. There are conflicts in social dimensions such as gender and ethnicity with values and preoccupations of those who dominate. Critical Theory builds on the legacy of customs, ideology, institutions and other cultural elements to scrutinise contemporary practices and issues. This includes phallocentric and feminist values and practices and the ideology of individualism as opposed to that of the collective.

For Alvesson and Willmott (1996:14) any sense of sovereignty ‘is not integral to human nature’ but is ‘socially generated and reproduced’. Thus CT takes up a partisan position between critique and dogmatism winning a further victory with each stage of emancipation (Habermas, 1971). This is liberation by means of reflection and practice. In the broader societal sense the goals of such action would be to, for example, eliminate suffering. In order to play a part in changing conditions critique, which is more than mere reconstruction, it is necessary to help the transition from theory to practice. In this regard managers are social players and CT encourages such managers to go beyond the expected – growth, profitability and the like – into the realms of responsibility, democracy and the role of workers as people. For Alvesson and Willmott (1996:2) CT is concerned with ‘how people in large bureaucracies and consumers of mass goods are affected by corporations, schools, Government and mass media’ and the affect on people’s tastes, beliefs and behaviour.

Other metaphors

Like many non-conformist people, ideas or movements, proponents of CT struggle for its acceptance, precisely because it offers emancipatory potential and not a means-ends rationality that, for Alvesson and Willmott, (1996) has disabled and deafened the audience where advocates of scientific management may see CT as subversive. The science tag legitimises the technocratic understanding of management and in this sense provides a veneer of authority and respectability. Such managers try to control through the rhetoric of language such as quality, empowerment and re-engineering. This management style, in seeking control, is in danger of subjugating its underlings as this is seen as an advantageous thing to do. Alvesson and Willmott (1996:14) like the metaphor of 'manegigo', literally to handle (or train) a horse. This can be read as either having many things associated with it, with the rider as handler in a particular situation whereby issues, problems and so on cannot be solved in a technical way. Or the metaphor can be viewed as being about an elite group the handler belongs to where the maneggiarre (manager, handler) is superior to those that they manage or handle). Morgan (1997) urges us to find our own metaphor set for the context in which we are dealing.

A different kind of management

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, another way of legitimising conventional management is to dress things up in progressive language. This is the paradox of the progressive management text. Mintzberg's (1994b) picture of managers or executives satisficing i.e. moving from one task and doing the best they can, optimising as they go, is the means of management control and therefore the opportunities of scope. The challenge to this is the idea of allegiances, preoccupations and hunches that influence managers who take steps outside of the traditional management paradigm way of seeing and doing. The main thrust of the CT argument is the problems with the manager as technicist, where even at higher levels of management emphasis is on technique rather than critical reasoning. This secures the social position of management within organisations and reinforces the image of impartiality and of being apolitical. This is part of the paradox or illusion. An irony here is that in larger corporations and organisations at least the managers responsible for putting conventional management systems in place are at some point likely to be the victims of it themselves and regarded as units of labour or resources to be managed. This is management practice that constructs a reality that, for political reasons, denies managers of any real quality. They are, in fact, hoisted by their own petard. They are therefore potentially ‘victims as well as perpetrators’ but should not have to be ‘ciphers’ that ‘serve the predetermined needs of some higher entity’ such as capital or the state (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003:14).

Social responsibility

Social responsibility for large corporations but for smaller organisations too is on the agenda. The move from the societal level as discussed in chapter one of this thesis to that of management highlights the same issues, for example emancipation, the blocking of beneficial innovations, technocratic management subverting democracy or the pitting of managers against their subordinates. A non-technocratic agenda means ‘issues of power and ideology are to be taken seriously’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003:15). In this there would have to be a move from a state of false to a state of true consciousness, where critical management would encourage ‘noise to break the silence’ and ‘critical thinking to enrich the state of mind and empirical world of management’ where managers could ‘demonstrate their added value’ to diverse social groups (Alvesson and Willmott, 2003:19).

Democratically accountable management

CT suggests a version of management that is a qualitatively different form of management and is one of many versions of anti-traditional management. It is one that is more democratically accountable to those whose lives are affected by management decisions. This is the opposite of the elitist self-style expert whose allegiance is to themselves and/or their masters. Through CT eyes management is a social practice whereby tensions exist between management science and the realities of practice. However CT does not refute techniques entirely but wants to resolve things through a power relations approach. This depends upon tensions and problems that need illumination and transformation of power relations even though CT is embedded in these relations. CT need not be anti management but is guided by emancipatory intent, it drawing from traditional management by understanding modern forms of domination. CT is therefore concerned with the critique of ideology as a means of challenging conventional wisdom and therefore enabling liberation. For Fulop and Linstead (1999:1) being critical ‘does not mean standing outside of management and exposing its flaws and weaknesses' but rather it 'entails an active and passionate commitment to improving managers' abilities to deal with the problems they face and helping them to discover how to manage better'.

Received wisdom may be reconstructed but cannot become critique until this inspires and guides the personal and social (emancipatory) transformation process. For this to happen people have to seek change. Thus habits and institutions have to be moved if they impede the development of responsibility and autonomy where the former depends on the interdependence of people and nature, but the latter depends on the development of institutions in which interdependence is achieved in practice and not hindered by influences such as patriarchy or egoism. The culture of the organisation may for example provide more female values that emphasise empathetic, intuitive or organic forms of behaviour that are better able to 'cope with uncertainty and turbulence of the modern environment' (Morgan, 1997:136). There might be more of a collectivist feel where the organisation is networked through what Morgan calls 'webs of inclusion' and where people feel that they are in the middle of things. Other organisational cultures may stem from ethnicity or from a professional stance such as the accountancy profession.

Construction of reality

Understanding the organisation is always cultural and construction of reality key. Morgan (1997:141) underscores *accomplishments* in terms of rules and social norms (after sociologist Harold Garfinkel) and the process of *enactment* (after psychologist Karl Weick) that stresses the proactive role the unconscious plays in 'creating our world'. Therefore the simple variable or elements of culture approach is rejected in favour of culture being understood as a living phenomenon 'through which people jointly create and recreate the worlds in which they live' (Morgan, 1997:141). This can be a shared reality with frames of reference and this can make for effective management in terms of for example the cohesive cultures (after Peters and Waterman, 1982) of IBM (emphasis on service) or Hewlett Packard (emphasis on 'sell it to the sales staff'). Morgan argues that the old mode of failed bureaucratic logic, re-engineering or empowerment has to be replaced with a more critical and emancipatory culture where the ritual of the weekly meeting moves from being a drudge and dictatorial to one of liberation because it is appropriate and shared. People know and own the impact they have on the social construction that is a shared reality. To cope with changes, rules or policies are not enough.

Management practice

Management will be practiced in a better and more enlightened form of social engineering through political struggle and reform in order to get to the situation where collective action results in participation in the community and the workplace. For Alvesson and Willmott (1996:200) this would be a ‘reflective workplace’ where ‘people would have to develop the capacity to think critically’ and become ‘reflective practitioners’. There is therefore a move from instrumental rationality to a more politico-ethical, greener and more positive image situation that is ‘good for business’ and is ‘seductive but ultimately chimerical’ (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:200). These authors submit that it may take, in some instances, Government involvement to see substantial change but with support and through critical reflection, thinking and awareness of ‘other possibilities for interpreting and acting upon streams of problems and solutions’ issues such as gender inequality, waste, or pollution can be tackled and through empowerment, things that need to be undone can be undone and change achieved (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996:202).

Critical Theory, marketing and management

There are two uses for the consideration of the CT approach in this thesis. The first is concerned with the nature of marketing as a body of knowledge and the second with Critical Theory’s influence and impact on management, dealt with above in general terms but here in terms of marketing management. Grafton-Small (1996:148) argues that ‘no human being and therefore no consumer exists except in terms of his or her own culture’. Markets are ‘human phenomena’ and ‘economic rationality is further undermined’ because individuals seek to make sense of things through others and there is potential for a shared culture. For Grafton-Small (1996:155) this is all about things being socially constructed; ‘we have forms of power and moral judgement therefore we are ethically responsible for commercial exchange’. Alvesson and

Willmott (1996:106) suggest a 'cultural doping' or a mystification metaphor to explain the influence marketing and marketers have had at the societal level in terms of such things as values and customs and the narcissism of advertising, the glamour of celebrity, self-indulgence or self-doubt. The 'colonisation metaphor' is used by Alvesson and Willmott (1996:106) to pull together other metaphors that help explain the impact on the life world where consumers are obliged to consume in order to exist and to fit in with the system or the 'image of the good life'.

Orthodox, relational and critical marketing

In a response to an article by Constantinides (2006), Moller (2006:2) suggests that it is 'both flawed and unfruitful to examine and interpret the Marketing Mix detached from its wider theoretical context, the Managerial School of Marketing'. The Mix, for Moller (2006:4), is 'normative theory', derived from management science as discussed earlier in this thesis. Moller supports the Marketing Mix position but does bring forward the relationship and e-marketing interfaces in terms of the 'market-based relationship marketing…' that '...can be characterised as the management of the firm's customer base, where the major challenge is to serve large numbers of customers individually and still profitably' (Moller, 2006:8). Thus for Moller 'we may still have some use for the Marketing Mix approach even under the new relational practices of interactive eMarketing'. Despite the suggestions of the Mix being obsolete and even detrimental as discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, Moller contends:

> "that the MSM provides still, the best approach and toolkit for those marketing management decision contexts where there exist a market of customers or set of customer relationships, which are characterised by market like exchange conditions".
>
> (Moller, 2006:7)

Moller (2006:9) maintains that marketing management decision problems are 'essentially "Marketing Mix" or marketing programme decisions' but concedes that these problems might be 'phrased in widely different vocabularies'. Moller argues that:

“If we can accept the fact that that each school can capture some aspects of reality, we should embrace and develop a multidisciplinary understanding of marketing”.

(Moller, 2006:9).

This sentiment is similar to that of Pels and Saren (2005:59) who seek a deeper understanding of ‘transactional, relational and pluralistic offerings’ when trying to explain choices that managers make. Parker (2003:202) suggests, for example, that business ethics can become a ‘specific part of marketing strategy’. Parker warns that business ethics constructs a problem, which can result in legitimisation of certain forms of knowledge and ‘firm but modest claims about utility’. However, this could also be seen as an attempt to subdue discontent. Parker (2003) asks whether business ethics existed before someone stuck a label on it.

However, the question is now being asked, what of critical marketing? The original CT was applied to society and to marketing and advertising in society in particular, as discussed earlier in this thesis. CT is a way of seeing that appears diametrically opposed to orthodox marketing; any interface between orthodox and critical marketing appears to be an oxymoron. The strong and perverse logical empiricist thought was expected to be superseded by the radical social theories of, for example, the new French variety (Hetrick and Lozada, 1999, and a reference to Foucault and others). The strength of the corporate rationality that includes profit maximisation and efficiency has deterred criticalness towards marketing, despite the recognition that this orthodoxy has benefited the elites and perpetuates the current social arrangements. However, change is afoot. New-found responsibility to the non-elite means that new groups of consumers could ‘engage in ethics-oriented discussions [that] could become quite pronounced’ (Hetrick and Lozada, 1999:162). The shift is from a critique of capitalism to Critical Theory as a liberating paradigm. The victimised consumer and alienation are not represented in traditional, orthodox marketing ethics. For Tilley (2000) in terms of environmental ethics for example, this would echo ethical discourse on shallow (rather than deep) ecological principles that for Tilley most small firms follow.

Hetrick and Lozada (1999:166) call for ‘consumers as well as [those] within the marketing research community’ to revise social relations. Hetrick and Lozada (1999:167) connect the idea of the supermarket/mall replacing the Church to the idea that Andy Warhol was ‘forcing us to address the collapse of high culture’. Binns’ (1999) commentary on Hetrick and Lozada’s analysis appears to suggest that these authors concentrate too much on the market and should be ‘less markety and more networky’ and open to ethical concerns and influence. Long term relationships and relationships with customers reflects the shift toward the ‘Kantian principles of respect for the customary and agency of individuals’ and if you can do that you will have developed a ‘combination of skills and vision needed to operate well’ (Binns, 1999:181).

Rational approaches to the management of marketing

For Alvesson and Willmott (2003:2) ‘individuality tends to reduce human beings to parts of a well oiled societal machine’ where notions of rationality, progress, social engineering and control dominate. In a similar fashion Smith (2002) purposefully uses the sociological perspective of the organisational behaviour literature to explore what he calls non-rational strategy. Smith is concerned with the effectiveness of marketing strategy and critical of the normative, prescriptive models that fall short in practice. The notion that formal planning is positively correlated with organisational effectiveness is tempered in Smith’s work by a second phase that is ‘something of a reaction against the absolute positivism of the first phase’ (Smith, 2002:274) whereby there is recognition of the complexity of management problems. In the second approach that looked at the planning/performance relationship it was recognised that this link is highly contingent upon a multitude of factors. Added to this is the recognition that ‘organisational effectiveness itself is very complex, more so than financial measures might allow for’ (Smith, 2002:274). Thus Smith, from a marketing strategy standpoint, is looking for the best process. For Smith, the simplistic target market definition and product/value proposition is all very well but this provides little by way of realising the quality of a marketing strategy.

The legitimisation of orthodox marketing and critical perspectives

Marketing as an academic discourse shifted from a critical perspective:

‘that showed how companies were exploiting consumers through their control of the market to being imbued with a managerial perspective, concerned to solve managers’ problems’.

(Morgan, 2003:113).

In other words following on from neo-classical economics, after being established in Midwestern universities as a discipline for the systematic analyses of how markets were distorted, the interest shifted in ‘how markets could be shaped by forces such as large firms and the state’ (Morgan, 2003:113). The legitimisation of marketing, as discussed earlier in this thesis, came about because marketing was seen to be on the side of the ‘angels’ (Morgan, 2003:114) i.e. for the consumer (meeting need) and not the production orientation dictats of the Ford variety.

Originally, in the societal context, CT’s contribution to debate was a fixation on the fetishism of commodities, products or brands in (consumer) society. Fetish is thus used in the sense that Marx intended. For Davidson (1992):

“The word fetish was therefore a highly-charged value judgement, particularly at a time when patterns of industrialisation and consumption (‘modernity’) were first establishing themselves, and when their supporting ideologies of progress and rationality were in such contrast to how ‘primitive’ cultures of the Empire were viewed”.

(Davidson, 1992:171).

Thus for Davidson, Marx is telling his audience that the material base to the economy equates to modern consciousness. Products of labour become social things with perceptible and imperceptible qualities. This is not, however, the marketer’s problem but that of wider society where identity, image and status are intertwined with consumption, where commodities and products but especially brands confer meaning, have meaning, are signifiers of something in the mind of the recipient of messages. Marketers and advertisers are able to use this to advantage, to codify and seduce. CT originally had pointed to narcissism in society where, for example, people want symbols for position or where true and false needs and false consciousness exist (Marcuse, 1964) or pop versus avant-garde, regarding the commercialism of art in capitalist societies (Adorno, 1973). This has led to the idea that commercial products in general can be looked upon in this light and that markets are indeed socially constructed. For Alvesson and Willmott (1996:123), through the 'propaganda of consumption', anything can be marketed and mantras such as 'shop till you drop' normalise things in the fetish kind of way as discussed earlier in this thesis. This is marketing as the champion of consumer need. Alvesson and Willmott use the example of McDonald's to illustrate this false consciousness where the image of speed, efficiency, consistency and other things suggest that consumption is the route to happiness whereas the reality is one of problem creation such as waste, health and ecology.

Marketing discourses

For Morgan (1996) marketing is seen as a discourse or series of discourses since it is involved with objects of consumption. Morgan (1996) suggests three marketing discourses worthy of discussion:

1. Marketing as an academic discourse. This is marketing as a servant of power and the colonisation of marketing by two groups; neoclassical economists (supply and demand) and psychologists (human needs). This discourse is about the social construction of needs and marketing management, identity, defining products and communicating information. This led to strong barriers to social critique within marketing itself (sort of ring fenced) until the arrival of postmodern marketing in the early 1990s. For this to happen and meet the challenge there is a need for the spread of information through journals and the like.
2. Marketing as management practice. This involves orientations and is the dominant discourse but there are cultural differences. Morgan uses the example of the Germans thinking that because of technical excellence products should sell themselves, and it was not until others matched them technically that German distinctiveness was challenged. This point links back

to points made earlier in this thesis on cultural paradigms and the culture of marketing for success.

3. Marketing technologies and the creation of the governable consumer. This involves marketing, knowledge, technologies and mass consumption. It is to do with shaping society, commodity fetishism, private profit and social anaesthesia. There is a triad effect of advertising, psychology and capitalism that gives us the social construct of the governable consumer. Morgan argues that ‘we have very little understanding of how marketing colonises organisations’ and what the ‘national, sectoral and firm levels of features which enable this to happen and with what consequences’.

(Glenn Morgan, 1996:126)

The governable consumer

The basic proposition of the ‘governable consumer’ is that segmentation, targeting and meeting pre-defined or determined needs of the segment/target can only be successful as long as the consumer – and society – accepts it. The combination of practice and the governable consumer provides a discourse of marketing and the consumer and also the discourse of politics and citizenship. This led to Philip Kotler and others, as discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, arriving at the Societal Marketing Concept, an attempt to support the hegemony and dominance of modernist marketing. For Morgan (1996), attempts to undermine this have been limited. The deconstruction and then reconstruction of marketing has led to some understanding of the relationship between the self and society in this context. However, as Morgan asks, can marketing really be blamed for the insecurities and problems people have? (Morgan, 1996:126).

For Smith (2003:280) ‘the literature suggests that strategic marketing planning can work, but that organisations find it too difficult to use in practice’. There are cognitive and cultural barriers that lead to barriers across the organisation as a whole. Associations between marketing orientation and performance in the marketing orientation literature are at odds with evidence in the organisational performance literature. Smith (2003:282) points out that:

"in high velocity environments…planning formality may be negatively associated with performance' but 'planning comprehensiveness has significant positive associations with performance".

Despite this claim most of Smith's article is devoted to the traditional planning model that is APIC (Analysis, Planning, Implementation and Control), steeped as it is in the American Marketing Paradigm of management conventions that are essentially positivist. However, Smith raises the possibility in the latter part of his piece of a second approach that is phenomenological with its roots in anthropology. Both the positivist and phenomenological schools have organisational culture as key, and both see culture as multi-layered. Just how the effectiveness of the marketing strategy process might be understood and improved is provided for Smith (2003) who suggests:

"theoretical and practical contributions are seen to be derived from contingency theory through: identifying important contingency variables that distinguish between contexts; grouping similar contexts based on these contingency approaches; determining the most effective internal organisational designs or responses in each major group……… Specifically, the ratio of command, incremental and rational processes might be changed to better fit the market and organisational culture in which the marketing strategy making process operates."

Smith (2003:283-284).

This suggests that prescriptive recommendations of the normative marketing planning literature can be improved upon by application to the organisations particular context. Another example is the aforementioned metaphor approach of Morgan (1997:335) who illustrates the possibilities of understanding the organisation through the use of a small public relations firm example, Multicom. Morgan suggests using metaphors to 'understand and shape the situations that you are seeking to organise and manage'. Morgan shows that by applying each of his set of metaphors, Multicom can be interpreted. For example it can be seen that Multicom drifted into mechanistic mode and that Multicom had a politicized and factionalised nature.

In this thesis I am seeking to go beyond the conventional with an SME marketing context as the chosen arena. The interplay between management and marketing is explored in this context in the rest of this chapter. This is done with the proposition that SME owner-managers are potentially already in favour of some form of emancipation, even if only for themselves, and are likely to be opportunity rather than market need driven when considering the environment that surrounds them.

SMEs, management and marketing

The nature of SMEs

Despite the influence in the UK of the 1971 Bolton Report that highlighted the size of SMEs, it is quite clear there are other parameters beyond size (Hill, 2001). Carson et al (1995:81) maintain that lack of resources and organisation leads to deficient decision-making but the SME may well be 'characterised by its entrepreneurial principal'. Limited resources bring increased risk and uncertainty (Bridge, O'Neill and Cromie, 1998:104). The model of the large firm does not provide a model for the SME merely scaled down (Gilmore, Carson and Grant 2001). Social relations impact on SMEs (Carson, Gilmore and Maclaran, 1998) and many SMEs fail to grow (McLarty, 1998). Rather than formal planning, owner-managers need to 'periodically sit down and think /talk about where they are now'. Hogarth-Scott (1996:51) refers to the 'importance of talking to people (customers and others)' and therefore 'interpersonal relationships are an important way of doing business'. The individual owner-manager, however, can be a powerful character with much authority and total responsibility. Owner-managers are often closer to the customer than large company managers can hope to be and are often managers of networks of actors such as suppliers, customers and finance. They 'are almost certainly opportunities-driven' (Bridge, O'Neill and Cromie, 1998:104). With this, there are a number of problems that come as no surprise; small team management, total management with multi-functional roles (many hats), no specialist personnel in support functions – in short an informal cabal that is limited in many ways where an ‘entirety of issues …have to be dealt with personally’ (Stokes, 2002:254).

Personalities and commonalities as dimensions of SMEs and SME owner-managers

Gilmore (2002b:10) suggests that there are ‘trigger factors’, variances, situation-specific factors and commonalities that can help define the SME. For Carson and Cromie (1989) characteristics are all important. Carson and Gilmore (1999) list risk-taking, being opportunistic, innovative and creative, adaptive and change oriented, visionary and individualistic. In terms of motivations, Carson and Gilmore (1999) list independence, personal satisfaction, employee well-being, customer satisfaction and integrity and ethical considerations.

There is strong evidence in the literature to suggest that SME owner managers do not adhere to convention but instead practice their own unique SME form of management activities. They are complex organisations that undertake an ‘immense range of activities’ (Curran and Blackburn, 2001:7). This is shaped by the individual’s personality traits or characteristics. These characteristics are both by and for the business, i.e., they influence the business and are developed for it and by it. The owner-managers’ personality is therefore intimately linked to what the business is and why it exists, which means that, for example, personal ambitions, goals and reasoning have a vital influence on the potential and direction of the enterprise. Entrepreneurs have innovation, are achievers, have self-determination, take risks, are opportunist and independent, and want freedom (Bridge, O’Neill and Cromie, 1998). Entrepreneurs have a way of thinking, behaving and doing with an attitude to people, jobs, responsibilities, acquiring resources and promoting the enterprise (Carson et al, 1995). It should be noted, however that not all owner-managers are entrepreneurs but all owner-managers will have experiences, knowledge and information that is their own and not someone else’s. To a greater or lesser extent owner-managers have an entrepreneurial, marketing and technical role (Gilmore, 2002b). They have their own style and might be reactive or proactive (in Morrison’s 2003 study the tourism SMEs were relatively proactive), possibly depending upon the life cycle stage of the business. They will tinker with things and are experiential and conform to industry norms (Carson and Gilmore, 2000a).

Within small businesses generally there are commonalities, especially in terms of practice (Enright, 2001, 2002). Personality types by definition display certain characteristics. Enright (2002) lists seven characteristics of the smaller enterprise operator and eight commonalities found in smaller enterprise operators. For example characteristics include markets being scanned rather than measured and owner-managers having an eye for the main chance. Commonalities are things such as no formal business training and no reliance on formalised planning procedures.

Carson (2002) underlines the idea that theoretical simplicity and intuitive complexity appears to be two key components to the mind of the entrepreneur. This could very well apply to the ordinary SME owner manager also, but against a backdrop of experience-founded knowledge, i.e., knowledge mostly gained experientially. Deacon (2002), an ex-entrepreneur, recalls how the firm was an extension of his own personality (the colour used throughout the company was his favourite shade of Pantone green). Deacon claims that those firms around him displayed similar characteristics – those of their owners. Gilmore (2002b) concurs, using the term ‘strong impact’ to describe the effect that the personality of the SME owner manager has on how business is done. Personality is, for Gilmore, an unknown quantity since it is influenced by upbringing, previous experience and personal goals. This is echoed by McAuley (2002b) who underlines that entrepreneurs in particular are opportunity rather than marketing or market-led, as does Stokes (2002a).

Enright (2002) is an advocate of the tribal approach whereby the trade, industry or market situation and even location have an impact on what is common to a particular group of SMEs. Carson (2002) on the other hand prefers to highlight commonalities that are much more akin to the personality factors of theoretical simplicity (keeping things simple for reason of size, scope and resources) and intuitive complexity (in particular with entrepreneurs). Common to many SMEs, especially entrepreneurs, are: spontaneity (not decisions based on logical, planned frameworks); opportunity (often taking the enterprise in a different direction because of the exploitation of competitive advantage this brings); secrecy (for the sake and protection of the business); and company-specific marketing awareness (no interest in marketing theories, just activities that work or may work for the business) (Carson, 2002).

The nature of SME marketing

What SME marketing is

Defining marketing in SMEs has not been easy and there is today still a wide range of views. It is complex and 'beyond dyadic relationship' (McAuley, 2002a:14). McPherson (2007) suggests that marketing in small firms is shaped by the owner's personality. Owners do not subscribe to traditional marketing and are reactive, ad hoc and lean toward personal selling. Simpson, Padmore and Taylor (2005:7) suggest that 'many owner-managers simply misunderstand marketing as the 4Ps or interpret marketing as advertising' but concede that while the small business context needs theory 'some marketing elements may not be apt' (Simpson, Padmore and Taylor, 2005:5). Anderson and McAuley (1999) suggest that the context will determine the mix, which in SME terms will be a combination of orthodox and relationship marketing. This will depend on size of business. For micro businesses, marketing is tactical with word-of-mouth of importance but for SMEs, marketing is more strategic (Anderson and McAuley, 1999). The nature of marketing depends on the life cycle stage too for Carson and Gilmore (2000) who also view marketing as situation specific, reactive, intuitive, inherent, practical and pragmatic. Fuller (1994) describes marketing as not a priority. In contrast Siu and Kirby (1998:41) have marketing down as relevant in the early stages of a new venture but not during 'expansion', 'professionalism' or 'consolidation'. For these researchers SME marketing should be proactive but often marketing is primitive or non-existent or reflects the owners' personal characteristics and is peripheral until contingencies have to be dealt with. McPherson (2007:6) describes marketing as being low priority but despite obstacles to marketing in small businesses can help with 'strategic thinking' in terms of marketing objectives and ROI, a sentiment not shared by everyone as discussed below.

According to Hogarth-Scott (1996:51) ‘marketing is often seen by small businesses as peripheral’ and it is only when things go wrong that it ‘becomes a central concern’. This means that limited resources, the absence of functionalised structures (often with one person at the helm) and conflicting demands results in a proactive approach to marketing in small firms. Marketing is seen as an expensive irrelevance for most of the time. For Hogarth-Scott (1996:51), we need to understand the context in which we are dealing:

“..we do not understand strategy and marketing as it relates to small business. We ask the wrong questions, too often try to impose the 4Ps framework, and accept at face value the apparent inability or unwillingness of small businesses to ‘practise marketing!’”.

Apart from the actual offering, the top three factors of importance in research on marketing in small businesses were people, finance then marketing (Hogarth-Scott, 1996). With the latter, there was evidence of identifying targets which targets to service in ways other than price/quality/service although price was a key issue. Beyond these elements, there is relationship marketing (owner-managers having close working relationships with customers and staff), word-of-mouth advocacy and strong negative associations with advertising. This means, for Hogarth-Scott (1996:51), that business owners need a clear understanding of the basic principles and techniques of marketing and not ‘complex theories or sophisticated highly formalised procedures’.

For Deacon and Corps (2003), small firms’ managers are uncertain how to grow market share, develop products or retain customers but they define marketing in line with direct exchanges and building relationships. Small firm development is linked to learning but market development is key (Deacon and Corps, 2003). SME managers define marketing in their own terms. They see planning generally as an impossible ideal and do not value marketing planning. They use marketing for managing problems but do not treat marketing in the same way as do education and training providers. Carson and Gilmore (1999) agree that textbook marketing is not what occurs in the small firm and that entrepreneurial marketing probably needs further refinement still. In Tragear’s (2003) study of small craft firms participants did not use textbook terms for marketing, a word that was loaded with sensitive meaning. Such firms may be different from more commercial businesses, being non-commercial and lifestyle-oriented, involving creativity and satisfying work. Non-the-less language appears important. There is the potential for product orientation because of the way small firms emerge and develop in certain industries and there is a tendency toward more specific elements of the marketing mix such as salesmanship or word-of-mouth. As for marketing planning, Carson and Gilmore (1999) describe marketing decision-making with words such as simplistic, haphazard, spontaneous, and intuitive. However, they add that marketing innovation can take place in small firms and it is perhaps the focus on product that allows for this.

For Stokes and Blackburn (1999) small business owners give marketing low priority. They see it as something bigger firms do. Sales are seen as the thing that is a priority and selling is the thing to do. Lack of specialist expertise and a limited impact on the market place indicates that marketing in SMEs is characterised by its own limitations (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). Marketing tends to be haphazard, informal, loose, unstructured spontaneous and reactive. Industry or sector norms are conformed to (Carson et al, 1995, Hill, 2001).

Marketing and entrepreneurship

The University of Illinois declared this year (2007) the 20th anniversary of research into the marketing/entrepreneurship interface and much has been done through the UK Academy of Marketing and in particular its Special Interest Group, or SIG. There is clearly a link between marketing and entrepreneurship, especially in terms of innovation and creativity (Collinson and Shaw, 2001). A key distinction was made in the 1980s literature between the ‘entrepreneurial’ and the ‘ordinary’ small firm manager where the former is seen as being significantly different from the latter (for example Deeks and Wilkie, 1973, Bathie, 1985, Curran, 1988). This is particularly important in the area of strategic thinking, where it could be argued that it is the very entrepreneurial streak that is the antithesis of the kind of strategic thinking educators and trainers try to impose on all small firms. Similarly, during the 1990s and towards the new century, the differences between micro businesses and SMEs that can have an effect on thinking and decision-making were being discussed (for example Stokes, 1997, 1999, Carson and Gilmore, 1999).

Entrepreneurs are opportunistic, innovative and proactive (McAuley, 1998). Despite limited resources, there is particular interest in the ability to innovate (Freel, 2000). Entrepreneurial marketing finds ideas and tries to seize opportunities and then offer what results to the market. The two orientations of marketing and entrepreneurship are not necessarily mutually exclusive and both orientations can be adopted (Tzokas, Carter and Kyriazopoulas, 1999). For Shaw (2004) both involve change, opportunity and innovation. Just how entrepreneurial the marketing will be depends upon opportunity recognition, entrepreneurial effort, organisational culture and ability of managers to network. Part of this may be linked to McCarthy's (2003) entrepreneurial types; pragmatic and charismatic. Many small firms practice some of the types of marketing practiced by larger companies (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000). Some even adopt the marketing concept but sophisticated marketing theory or techniques have little meaning for the small firm owner-manager (Carson and Gilmore, 1999, Copley 2000).

The role of innovation and interactivity

Stokes (1999, 2000) presents a 'four + four Is' model of entrepreneurial marketing that is an alternative to the four Ps and is bottom up rather than top down. First Innovation in all aspects of marketing (incremental, with adjustments) is followed by Identification (of target markets from a bottom-up rather than top-down perspective). Next is Interactive (marketing methods), which contains the other four Is; Influence, Image Building, Involvement and Incentives. Lastly is Information gathering (informally, through networking). This is a typical hierarchical framework with all of the problems inherent in such an approach but this has the advantage of simplicity for explanation and understanding of a process. It is a fusion of traditional marketing and the qualities and elements of entrepreneurship with a strong emphasis on innovation, networking and interactivity with the entrepreneur as agent of change.

Not all small businesses or enterprises exhibit innovation and some may play it safe (Hill and LaForge, 1992, Adair, 1990, Carson et al, 1995) but innovation is often the driving force behind SMEs and certainly entrepreneurs. There are clearer cases when the innovation involves environmental/green challenges for small firms (Noci and Verganti, 1999). Innovation is not just about new products but about things such as adapting existing product, services or market approaches. Cummins et al (2000) list what innovations are and do; they encompass all marketing activities, are based on existing ideas, are opportunities and they are influenced by the owner-manager network. However this paper exposes a paradox in that innovations are said to be reactive and market led (opportunity spotting), yet entrepreneurs are said to be proactive and opportunity creators. Cummins et al (2000) point out, however, that change is continuous and normally incremental (rather than rapid) so that market gaps can be exploited.

Stokes (1999) argues that informal information gathering for decision-making (on for example the introduction of new products) and day-to-day running and control of the business would replace any notion of formal marketing research. However, Chaston (1999) argues for monitoring of the environment through, for example, competitive information, possibly from existing customers, to develop appropriate internal competencies. This is not inconsistent, however, with the informal approach suggested by Carson (1990), Goldhar and Deshpande, (1997), Stokes (1999), Day (2000) or Jones and Rowley (2007) amongst many others.

The important issue of e-marketing has entered the literature and important as it may be, it ‘will not replace or devalue traditional marketing activities (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007). This is seen as a proactive area but with practical barriers, for example in implementation, maintenance and organisational attitudes. SMEs become dependent on specialists and so far there have been poor websites, no real measurement, problems associated with spam and lack of time (Gilmore, Gallagher and Henry, 2007).

Marketing knowledge and informal versus strategic planning

Put quite simply, lack of marketing knowledge can result in SME failure (Carson and McCarton-Quinn, 1995). Passivity and waiting for the customer to come to them and place orders (Hills, 1987), insufficient marketing knowledge (Davis and Klassen, 1991) or underused or misunderstood knowledge (Carson, 1990, Hogarth-Scott, Watson and Wilson, 1996) also contribute, in some cases, to SME failure or poor performance. SME marketing is opportunistic in constantly and quickly changing markets, often offering quality products or speedy delivery and other incentives or top service, immediate response and integrity. For McPherson (2007) small business marketing is informal and unplanned and this is linked to the differing orientations small firms have and to short-term orientation. SMEs lack practice in marketing planning and implementation (Hogarth-Scott, Watson and Wilson (1996). Strategic, orthodox marketing planning is rejected on the grounds of it being too complex, in a study of SME marketing by Lancaster and Waddelow (1998). This study of 20 SMEs calls for a simple, tactically based methodology that suits SME needs. In this view, the MD of the small firm is not a strategist or involved in strategic thought but, rather, a process person. Therefore, Lancaster and Waddelow advocate flexibility and adaptability within planning and the reflective skills of the manager rather than a rigid framework that the business/manager is locked in to.

Some writers and researchers appear to expect orthodox marketing planning and associated marketing activities. For example, Vandewalle and Bice (2006:9), in a study of service SMEs on Merseyside, list in their findings lack of marketing knowledge and understanding and lack of resources to perform marketing. They appear to lament the findings of no marketing planning, ‘inadequate marketing research’ and rejection of the marketing concept. Many would suggest that smaller firms plan informally (for example McPherson, 2007). Lancaster and Waddelow’s (1998) key point seems to be that marketing planning is not formally conducted but is effective despite being informal. Their study highlights a number of issues around the importance of informal planning. Small firms' managers spend resources on marketing but call it another name such as networking where word-of-mouth and personal contacts are important. In general, vocabulary for marketing in SMEs is shaped by the environment surrounding the SME. Small firms' managers appear to define marketing in their own terms and this is reflected in the language that they use which is not always, if at all, the language of conventional marketing theory. Rather, language is founded on industry or sector lines or is local or regional (Carson et al, 2003). SME managers are concerned with short term, tactical issues and getting things done; a doing rather than thinking culture. This gives rise to pressure, failure to prioritise, ineffective managers being valued for loyalty, and being locked in to the here and now. Small firms' managers have a mirror image view of the world where the mirror may be distorted. Small firms' managers are not all the same and need flexible/adaptive marketing, which may be different at different stages of life of the business. Therefore marketing planning is seen as a task not an action document. There can be informality where informal plans can be thorough but have to secure consistency. Small firms' managers are not seen as having a strategic marketing orientation in the orthodox, modernist mould. Many things stand in the way of marketing planning, for example limited research, external pressures, or individuals' perception. Some feeling of being more professional through formal planning was found, i.e., some could see the benefits of thinking more, having a focus and direction. Where planning was carried out it was done so reluctantly, an annual chore that had to be done for other, ulterior motives or other pressures but no real value was attached to business or marketing planning (Lancaster and Waddelow, 1998).

Smith (2003:280) proposes that the conventional approach to strategic planning would be inappropriate since this could not apply to the SME because of 'lack of resources and knowledge as barriers to rational planning'. Lancaster and Waddelow's sample had no marketing plan. The usual limited resources were found to be a powerful inhibitor but other reasons included: a manufacturing orientation and hence an anti-marketing stance on the part of production people; being engaged in the production process and not setting goals; lack of knowledge of the planning process; lack of knowledge of marketing, at best being able to define marketing along very simplistic CIM lines; non-use of marketing language with the usual 'advertising'-type tag; lack of value of marketing as opposed to (say) accountancy as a legal requirement and therefore inescapable; people not being qualified; time (marketing not a priority within busy schedules); and guilt in wasting time on preparation for marketing planning reflecting perhaps, the lack of value attached formal marketing (Lancaster and Waddelow, 1998).

Spectrum of marketing strategies and competencies

One of the key arguments for SME success is the adoption of a niche strategy where the SME can serve a niche or a segment of the market that is not well served by larger companies. This might be for obvious reasons such as not being substantial enough in terms of profitability. This can suit the SME as prices can be maintained and marketing is conducted on quality, service and other such parameters (Scarborough and Zimmerer, 1996). SMEs can concentrate resources in a non-mass market and achieve good market share rather than having an immeasurable share of a mass market. In this way, an SME can achieve a differentiated position through non-price means and there is room for an innovative approach to marketing rather than price-cutting. Pricing is an important factor in any SME strategy (Chaston, 1999). Small firms lack marketing capabilities (Blenker, 2002) and there are a number of marketing competencies that can be identified in various areas. Hill (2001) lists five such areas: experience, both strategic and operational with opportunistic instinct influences marketing; knowledge, technical, product and processes; communication with a relational communication cluster whereby operationally relationship building occurs but the long term perspective involves internal trust, people skills, approachability, listening skills, adaptability, empathy and honesty; judgement, as a competency is sacrosanct and depends on the quality of experience especially regarding routine marketing decision-making; and intuition, like judgement a key marketing competency, in dealing with objective knowledge. For Carson and Gilmore (1999) the SME manager has to be able to adapt marketing techniques but would need to have or to develop skills in order to do this. Cummins, Gilmore and Carson (2001) split marketing decision-making competencies in SMEs into core, specific and inter-relationship. Core competencies are similar to Hill (2001); knowledge, experience, judgement, communication and networking. Specific competencies are vision/ambition, opportunities recognition, drive/determination, motivation and innovation. Cummins, Gilmore and Carson (2001) add interactive competency. This is similar again to Hill (2001) who talks of the personal contact network being natural and not planned and is therefore a naturally occurring competency. This is something that can be learned in a variety of ways but largely through some form of experiential learning (Cummins, Gilmore and Carson, 2001).

Relationship marketing and networking in SMEs

In terms of communication objectives, SME networking is all about cooperating on ideas, knowledge and technology (Dean, Helmes and Smith, 1997) and therefore networking is seen as a route to success through interacting with others. Gronroos (1994a) includes a reference to networks when defining relationship marketing:

> "a process including several parties or actors…done by mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises, a fact that makes trust an important aspect of marketing. Inherent in this definition is a view of suppliers or service providers interacting in a network …"
>
> (Gronroos, 1994a:13-14)

While theoretically relationship marketing should apply well in SME contexts, in practice, some problems especially with the customer retention aspect (Fournier, Dobscha and Mick, 1998) arise. The natural temptation to engage in relationships that help win new customers and keep them inexpensively is strong with SMEs on tight budgets and a cost-effective way of building business and customer retention means greater profits (Buttle, 1996). A network is a collection of individuals who may or may not be known to each other (O'Donnell, 2001). Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001:7) suggest networking is marketing in SMEs where a network conforms to industry norms. Personal contact is better than impersonal promotions and a source of information (Collinson and Shaw, 2001, Hill, 2001, O'Donnell, 2001, Stokes, 2000, Carson et al, 1998, Shaw, 1995). Networking is a critical business resource (Morrison, 2003) and networking, partnership building and cooperative marketing can provide competitive advantage (Braun, 2002).

Personal contact networks

Personal contact networks (PCNs), often associated with entrepreneurs, have been contrasted with inter-organisational networks (Tonge, 2006). Different types of networker are highlighted. For example, Tonge describes the 'reluctant networker' as opposed to the entrepreneur. This could be a useful element when distinguishing between entrepreneurial and ordinary owner-managers. PCNs help achieve customer retention (Coviello and Munro, 1995) where, for example, customer participation is important whether this be via formal or informal means (Filiatrault and Lapierre (1997). For Hill and Wright (2001) PCNs are fundamental to doing business, particularly with entrepreneurial SMEs. Interpersonal contact with primary customers is the norm (Orr, 1995). The likely marketing communications for SMEs, especially manufacturing SMEs, is not going to be advertising, largely regarded as a waste of money and ineffective, but word-of-mouth (Hogarth-Scott, Watson and Wilson, 1996). For these reasons personal relationships coupled with quality and service are more important than the traditional marketing 4P activities of larger companies. Indeed different relationships with different organisations (for example suppliers or trade organisations) are vital to survival and success in a rapidly changing environment (Stokes, 1999, Carson et al, 1995). Care is needed to ensure the relationship does not go into decline or reverse and therefore the SME cannot sit on its laurels and should pursue customer intimacy (Rao and Perry, 2002). Here, help is at hand from database technology that can help the SME be consistent in its dealings with customers (Coviello, 2000). It should be noted however that not all customers are worth retaining (Buttle, 1996). Not all SMEs would want a database as the expense to try to create one may be futile and wasteful (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999).

Organisational culture and relationship marketing

Organisational culture can be influential on the amount of relationship marketing practiced (Stewart and Durkin, 1999). Interaction and networking might have greater emphasis in the SME marketing arena (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000). Networking (including recommendation and personal contact) brings a new dimension beyond the dyadic notion of relations between two parties. Such networks could be called ‘interaction-based relationships’ (Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000) or ‘a broader network of interacting businesses’ (Harden, 2004). This is a challenging, complex interaction where many things are unfamiliar. This is an indication that networking is easy to say but in fact is hard (work) to do.

Mattsson (1997) looked at the differences between relationship marketing and networking. The former can be said to be a management orientation with a set of management actions that is normative and driven whereas the latter can be said to have interactions within relationships and be inductively derived, not driven. SMEs can be said to be personally relational and are therefore closer to the customer base (Carson et al, 1995), with face-to-face personal involvement. They can be flexible and opportunistic, using personal contact within networks to develop business, and to obtain information and feedback. Small business owner-managers can be users of inter-organisational relationships for to achieve growth (Coviello and Munro, 1995).

Networking and social endeavours

Networking involves social endeavours through trade events, personal contacts and marketing intermediaries that lead to social, business, industry and marketing relationships that see the sharing of knowledge, ideas and ways of doing business that reduce costs (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). In this sense, networking is social capital (Clarke et al, 2006). A network can be many things including conference attendance and informal or formal meetings with buyers and suppliers. This can be seen as part of Coviello, Brodie and Munro's (2000) spectrum of activities and marketing practices that can be non-traditional and informal gatherings and groupings as well as formal ones. Therefore, there is a high level of investment in interpersonal contact and targeting taking place with relevant individuals or groups. Coviello, Brodie and Munro (2000) note that this kind of activity is capital (and other resources) intensive for small firms but presumably more effective. Gilmore, Carson and Rocks (2006:290) also note that networking is used but there is 'a wide variation of the extent of networking from sophisticated to selective'. Marketing network processes (MNPs) are dynamic/relational and structural/physical where 'bonded individual networks are strongly influenced by key players' (Carson, Gilmore and Rocks, 2004:370). Jocumsen (2004) notes that advisors should accept that there is low-level use of outside professional help because of the strength of inherent competencies and internal family and non-family networking.

Filiatrault and Lapierre (1997) note that this takes skills and high concentration but since customer satisfaction is of the utmost importance, especially in BtoB markets, loyalty, profitability and growth can come from achieving sustainable competitive advantage in this way. Filiatrault and Lapierre advocate a before, start, during and after relationship model that involves evaluation, participation, leading, satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, through networking (including personal referrals) relationships can develop. Evaluation includes past history, quality, links and competencies that should be weighed up before the start of the relationship. Needs, responsibilities, prejudices, control and feedback can be ironed out during the relationship through regular meetings and other contact, customer training and the establishment of a formal or informal partnership. Whether satisfaction is achieved should be measured by some sort of survey or call back/follow up visiting and an exit strategy determined if loyalty is not achieved and a new project not started.

Gilmore, Carson and Shaw (2001) see the need to harness networks for a proactive marketing infrastructure. Marketing by networking is ad hoc with little cost relative to orthodox marketing and is done formally via business clubs and informally via the golf club. Costs are often mere exhibition or seminar entrance fees. Marketing by networking is natural and inherent – a competency (Carson et al 1995). It is part of the characteristics or qualities. International networks may be more formal than domestic ones (Perry, 1999). For Curran and Blackburn (1994), SME owner-managers have relatively small and non-expensive networks with little resort to externals such as accountants.

Limitations to marketing in SMEs

Resources are the obvious limitations to marketing in SMEs but money is not the only thing. The SME might be lacking in specialist expertise/skills, time is a factor as is marketing knowledge, (for example Carson et al, 1995, Gilmore, Carson and Grant 2001, Stokes, 2000). Stokes (2000) adds distrust and lack of interest in marketing, seeing it as a con or inappropriate to the SME context. A limited customer base, dependency on managers' marketing competencies, lack of formalised planning, and difficulties in developing and then defending niches or gaps, results in simple and non-sophisticated, informal marketing (Carson et al, 1995). SMEs are pulled toward activity that decreases risk and they consolidate their position (Collinson and Shaw 2001). As a result of these limitations SMEs are really forced to do things differently to bigger companies. Formality is the key area of difference. There is a lack of formal structure and marketing is not seen as formal. SMEs have key collaborators and a variety of methods are employed to find clients including networking, recommendations, word-of-mouth and the Internet. Personal selling is a key communication tool but the Internet is growing. In-house brainstorming and discussions with colleagues and associates is common and informal (Jocumsen, 2004).

Chapter summary

This chapter has considered marketing practice in the chosen context against that of the dominant modernist marketing orthodoxy in terms of management and management paradigms. This considered organisational culture and impact of Critical Theory on management generally, on marketing and on SME marketing in the context under study in this thesis. The following chapter deals with marketing ETD in SMEs and the role of the enterprise and development agencies (EDAs) in this context.

CHAPTER FOUR - EDUCATION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT (ETD), MARKETING AND SMEs AND THE ROLE OF ENTERPRISE AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES (EDAs)

Introduction

Historically, there has been a lack of consistency and

"assessing and implementing training needs has led to the UK lacking a flexible and long-term policy to address problems of skills needs, demographic shifts and changes in the character of employment".

(Mcbride, 1998:20).

This chapter explores the nature and role of ETD (including management training and development, MTD) but in particular SME marketing ETD. This chapter aims therefore to provide a review of relevant literature in the area of management training and development (MTD), SME marketing ETD and the role of the EDAs in all of this.

This chapter has several objectives. These are linked to the central research question of this thesis. The key research question addressed is, if marketing is very different in the SME context to that of larger firms, is there a new requirement to meet a different set of SME ETD (including MTD) needs that considers a different kind of marketing subject matter? This includes any practical meaning there is for SME marketing ETD and any differences in types of people and businesses for the delivery of SME marketing. The history and nature of ETD, including MTD, is explored. The role of the enterprise and development agencies in MTD is considered generally and within the SME context, and the ramifications of this for future MTD are reflected upon. In terms of learning, the chapter considers the learning process and in particular experiential learning in SMEs. It also considers the implications for teaching and learning and the curriculum, SME learning environments and delivery enabling devices. However it should be noted that while of course important, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to include learning per se.

Management training and development (MTD) within ETD and the role of the enterprise and development agencies in the UK

History

Over time, concerns about training becoming subordinate to those about unemployment leads McBride (1998) to argue that industry must do more for training. Generally in the UK in the 1950s, deficiencies in training were evident with a seemingly see-saw argument. By the early 1960s there were those in favour of training to be left to industry and others requiring a root and branch solution through Government.

Training and education

The debate over education and training historically has taken a number of twists and turns over the last few decades. Liberal education designed to prepare 'an elite destined to rule' (McBride, 1998:21) was different in kind to any offering to workers who were merely units of labour. Lack of Government involvement and industry's attitude meant a shortage of skills. By the early 1960's concerns were being aired that outside of the apprenticeship system there was an acute lack of investment in the training of managers, supervisors and workers. It was at this time that the UK Government became interested in training and in 1964, the Industrial Training Act saw the creation of training boards that were 'constituted to reflect predominantly employer and trades union interests' (McBride, 1998:21). Modular training followed after training needs analyses and would deal with 'skills and tasks, integrated theory and practice, determined standards, applied programmed learning, approved and resourced centres of training'. There was a move towards certificated competence and a recognition of the 'need to sustain a "spectrum of skills" to meet a rainbow of needs' (McBride, 1998:21).

Training and skills

During the 1970's the tension between investment in training and that of tackling unemployment emerged despite the Employment and Training Act of 1973, the creation of the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and a move toward the deregulation of training provision. By the end of the 1980s both the CBI and the TUC were concluding that there was an 'education and skills deficiency' that 'had reached crisis proportions' (McBride, 1998:21) despite the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) being created after the dissolution of the MSC. The UK Government decided, by April 2001, to disband the 72 English and 4 Welsh TECs. Most of their remit was transferred to Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) in England and the regional offices of Education and Learning Wales (ELWa) in Wales. The Scots had and still have not TECs, but LECs (Local Enterprise Companies). Business failure was thought to stem from low management competence and skills strategies. This had a disproportionate effect on competitiveness. Many SME managers in particular did not, and still do not, demonstrate high levels of management skills (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000). Learning is important because of changes in technology. SMEs need to have employees with skills and commitment in order to achieve competitive advantage where 'human capital is increasingly recognised as a key engine for economic growth' (Birdthistle, 2006, 551).

Management training and skills

The Handy and Constable/McCormack reports of 1987 maintained that managers in UK companies of any size lagging behind the competition, the suggestion being that an investment in MTD was essential (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999). There was also the suggestion that this had everything to do with SME survival rates and performance (Matlay, 2004, Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999) and an emphasis was put on the need to enhance the skills of individuals (Massey, 2004). Certainly, the Thatcher Government during the 1980s was very much in favour of small business development (Copley, 1989).

However, from these two influential reports of 1987, an emphasis was put on the promotion of MBAs and the DMS (Diploma in Management Studies) in order to enhance and develop management skills. In a similar vein, the Management Charter Initiative (MCI) and NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) were launched. The latter were about competence-based management qualifications set along side more traditional qualifications such as a degree. Competence-based NVQs were put in the place of BTEC and some City and Guilds where there was overlap. It is Smith et al’s (1999) view that NVQs are anti-theoretical and anti-learning and that the UK will not catch up with Europe because of the implementation of assessment-driven accreditation that lacks knowledge and understanding. Smith et al (1999) add that generally other problems with NVQs exist, such as variation between assessment centres and assessment by simulation, which goes against the ethos of competencies for real tasks. The individual is accredited not the business, NVQs cannot be used to deal with soft skills such as creativity, intuition and sensitivity and overall, NVQs are over-precise, jargon-ridden and they deal with the parts rather than the whole (Smith et al, 1999).

Management qualifications

The MCI was about management standards. Management standards should result in knowledge and skills that are relevant to the day-to-day requirements of managers (Loan-Clarke, 2000). All in all this was about closing the skills gap on the competition. By 1995, the UK Institute of Management had commissioned a survey, Management Development to the Millennium (Cole, 1995, Smith and Whittaker, 1998). Cole (1995:20) reports on the setting up of two working parties, ‘one chaired by Professor Tom Cannon and the other by Dr John Taylor’. The first looked at developments between 1987 and 1994 and the second was to look ahead from 1994 to the year 2001. These studies looked at a range of issues and found, for example, rapid growth in the take-up of management qualifications and that targets for diplomas were superseded by NVQs. The key challenges issued by the Cannon and Taylor (1994) project were:

- All firms (large and small) should recognize the need to be involved with management development.
- Senior management must commit to life-long learning and the pursuit of leadership.
- Standards and qualifications need to be transferable.
- Providers expect these to be specific and recognizable.
- There should be coherent information regarding management development needs of users of providers’ services.

(Cole, 1995:23).

Despite the targets set, in practice NVQs have not been taken up in the way intended. Indeed firms with less than 100 employees offer even less training than big firms, especially at NVQ level 5, the diploma equivalent level (Storey, Mabey and Thompson, 1997). A change of government in 1997 saw the New Labour Project become the New Labour Government and again the focus was on unemployment, especially for young people, with a target of 250,000 long-term unemployed with a £5 billion pounds Welfare to Work programme. However, despite the Education and Training Task Force effort, the tension between employment and training toward the end of the millennium remained a problem and there was a need, according to McBride (1998:21), to regain the 'clarity of thinking' that was apparent in the 1964 Industrial Training Act. Massey (2004: 460) uses the word 'flawed' in relation to this tension between training for performance and training for employment. Competence-based MTD resulting in jobs rather than knowledge and skills is problematic even though some claim a correlation exists between MTD and the benefits for business success, although this does not necessarily mean the bottom line benefits (Smith et al, 1999). This tension and debate is an ongoing one in sectors of industry, in the UK regions and indeed in other countries. For example Birdthistle (2006), discussing Irish family SMEs, draws on the European Commission report (2002) that deals with a wide range of issues including learning needs and investment in people.

ETD support for SMEs

On the agenda, again it seems, is the recognition of the need to examine small firms and entrepreneurship training and support. This is not to suggest that small business and entrepreneurial activity has been ignored in the last few decades, as clearly it has not. De Faoite et al (2004) highlight the value of non-formal support structures and question the value of more formal business education and strategies as well as the failure of programmes to deal with differing cultural, educational and social backgrounds. This has meant that targeted programmes fail to assist, the suggestion being that more bespoke approaches might be necessary and that includes the use of more informal delivery methods such as mentoring and networking (De Faoite et al, 2004).

There is an array of training organisations in the UK some of whom engage with Government sponsored initiatives which represent the most important and consistent source of training for smaller firms. For Matlay (2004) there has been joined-up thinking in a long-term policy approach that attempts to deal with various trends while delivering training that meets short-term learning needs. Thus, we have seen, for example, the Investors in People (IiP) initiative and while this is a public commitment to training, SMEs have been very slow to take it up. Business Links were created, but not to serve smaller, micro businesses. The TECs/LECs had some success with smaller firms. The National Council for Vocational Qualifications that offers general NVQs (GNVQs) and management NVQs (MNVQs) has not been a qualified success in the SME arena. There is little likelihood that businesses would benefit from MNVQs, part of the problem being that accreditation of this sort is likely to be based on current, not future competencies (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000). Matlay (2004) suggests that as the size of the firm increases the greater the likelihood the take up of NVQs. SMEs appear not interested in NVQs specifically and accreditation generally for a variety of reasons. They prefer on the job training that is ad hoc and responsive to immediate and identifiable needs, to formal qualifications. The main barrier to training in SMEs is that it is perceived to be inconvenient and unnecessary. Matlay (2004) also highlights Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships (AMAs) for 16-17 and 18-19 year olds respectively, that can meet the specific training needs of smaller companies in a long-term relationship. Not many businesses in Matlay's research sample were aware of industrial training organisations, but the key problems that emerged were to do with inflexibility and the absence of a match between needs and what is on offer.

The role of the EDAs

For Loan-Clarke et al (2000), enterprise and development agency networks are designed to create prosperity in and build stronger communities. The primary role of the agency is generally to provide leadership and partnership in coordination, and to lead the development of strategic plans. They might also offer business development assistance and counselling, facilitate management training for SMEs, support investment and export development activities and generally focus on helping small businesses. It is recognised that education and training are part of this and the development of knowledge can give companies, a region and even a country competitive advantage. SMEs are therefore clearly important to economic growth (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000). Training is seen as an essential part of wealth creation and education as having a direct influence on entrepreneurial activity so that the UK Government has been keen to promote this kind of education and training (De Faoite et al, 2004). Education and training is needed to enhance business effectiveness (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000).

Providers of ETD and in particular training and development for SMEs and smaller firms are therefore quite often the EDAs. Loan-Clarke et al (2000) suggest that much activity is centred on competence-based qualifications promoted by the Government through the agencies. The goal of such initiatives and activities is improved business performance. Smith and Whittaker (1998) suggest that problems surface when the products on offer are general in nature and the agencies could be said to not be responding to the needs of particular businesses or sub-groups of businesses. The agencies have responded to this problem by promoting and undertaking training needs analysis in order to tailor or adapt provision. Part of this is to get small business managers to buy in to the notion of lifelong learning culture as the route to fulfilling potential. There is a need to develop a learning and training culture where learning is a more conscious thing (Birdthistle, 2006).

Government, it is argued, should promote policy development that has SMEs and smaller firms as central to the success of the UK economy. For this to happen there has to be human resource development across small firm/SME-land, but this is lacking. Training is perceived as beneficial but is currently not linked to actual success. Development opportunities that go beyond mere training are even harder to obtain, especially with SMEs (Smith and Whittaker, 1998). For Massey (2004) it is hard to prove that training provision improves performance but there is some evidence to suggest that this is the case. Massey’s (New Zealand) study suggests that training provided: a better-planned path for going forward; a better understanding of customers and how to market to them; raised business skills; a way to handle the financial needs of the firm; a decrease in time and materials waste; transfer of good ideas from business networks; and raised quality of products or services (Massey, 2004:460). However most small firms in the survey spent little on training. Massey suggests that governments and firms fail to apply robust and clear training investment decisions or evaluation of training. There is a need to analyse the fit between employee, job and the firm's needs, in order to improve investment performance of both Government and the firm (Massey, 2004). A study in Ireland (Birdthistle, 2006), suggested a paradox. There was concern over poaching of employees yet investment was still put in i.e. there was a willingness on the part of these Irish SMEs to develop the individual. However since this study involves family SMEs there may be an element of nepotism given that many employees are family members.

In terms of management training and development more generally, the National Education and Training Targets (NETTS) for management NVQs, the Investors in People Standard (IPS), the Management Charter Initiative (MCI), Management Standards and Management NVQs have seen some progress (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000), but this for Smith and Whittaker (1998) is slow. This experience could very well inform future policy on training and development for SMEs. The 1997 report on management NVQs and SMEs by Whittaker et al established the importance of small firms and SMEs to the economy in terms of the number of people employed, new business creation and factors such as turnover (Whittaker et al, 1997). This is then linked to training. However there are too many variables to draw the definite conclusion that training either managers or at the executive level helps survival or growth and development. Nor can it be conclusively said that an absence of training leads to business failure (Whittaker et al, 1997).

Management, training and development (MTD) and ETD for SMEs

As Smith and Whittaker (1998) point out a significant aspect of the development of SMEs is the development of managers in such SMEs. The problems to be tackled are many and varied but can be linked to the start up of the business, culture of family business, low number of employees, limited range of management skills available and difficulties in demonstrating training payback (Smith and Whittaker, 1998).

Few senior managers of SMEs hold management qualifications according to Whittaker et al (1997). Smith and Whittaker (1998:180) suggest that the culture of the organisation and the attitude of senior management will dictate the nature and degree of training and whether it is reactive or outgoing for development. Very small firms may be reluctant to break away from their chosen lifestyle and may not want to grow. Owner-managers may be too close to the operation of the business to be more outwardly developmental. Narrow experiential ‘learn by doing’ attitudes may prevail and senior managers learn accidentally through more informal interaction with people they meet. There is evidence that senior managers tend not to develop themselves except through a ‘school of hard knocks’ (Smith and Whittaker, 1998:180-181) which is really experientially driven and there is support for more formal approaches to learning and development to be integrated with the more informal ones. However, it is likely that senior managers who do not deliberately develop themselves are less likely to support training and development for managers and staff even though they might recognise the need for training and development (Smith and Whittaker, 1998). Birdthistle (2006) adds that formal learning in the classroom is not popular. Content of programmes is too theoretical and delivery too inconvenient. Some courses are necessary where linked to the trade. Informal learning takes place on the job by trial and error and through critical events. Learning is reactive and incidental not proactive, therefore a change is needed for a wider range of opportunities rather than quick and easy solutions that fit with the short term orientation of SMEs.

People development, in line with business objectives, is well recognised now in the UK through the Investor in People programme and NVQ qualifications. The question is how could this work in SMEs? Smith and Whittaker (1998) see NVQs as fine for managers in the Public Sector, and as competence-based management qualifications these should meet the needs of the SME. However resistance to both training and qualifications is apparent despite Government schemes to help SMEs. There is scepticism that such training helps the individual, but not the business (Loan-Clarke, 2000). The value of MNVQs is based on the assumption that MTD for SMEs would improve the competitive position of the business (Smith et al, 1999) rather than business degrees or diplomas. Time taken, cost and lack of relevance to SME need are barriers to the uptake of such training (Smith and Whittaker, 1998). The most successful SMEs provide the most training yet ‘the issue of MTD in SMEs has received little attention'. However, management development does increase the survival rates of SMEs. (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000:177).

Apart from cost, time (and bureaucracy) and relevance (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999) many other disadvantages have been illuminated in the literature. Jargon is problematic and off-putting especially for SMEs (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999). It is difficult for the SME and smaller firm manager to maintain commitment. There is a need to customise training needs but this is not the remit of NVQs. Assessors do not have credibility in the eyes of small firm managers (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000) and this is allied to the perception that trainers are too academic. They are unlikely to be up-to-date and likely to be inexperienced and it is 'quite possible therefore that the blind are leading the blind' (Smith et al, 1999:562). Training staff who will then move on for a promotion possibly with a rival firm can be seen as folly (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999). Provision has been of a technical rather than entrepreneurial nature. It has not been about ownership or management. This has given rise to a deficiency or gap. There is today the need to sell training and even to repackage it in order to engage with SME managers who appear to prefer MBA-type programmes over NVQs if they are interested at all (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999). It appears, though, that there is a preference for contextualisation in the work place, the belief being that management is best developed on the job through learning by doing (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000).

Delivery generally needs support in terms of time and training facilities and there may be a role for learning agreements (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000). It would appear that there is a preference for more informal one-to-one experience. This could happen within networking (Devins and Johnson, 2003). The European Social Fund Objective 4 (04) programme for Britain (1998-2000) underscores why MTD should be important to SMEs yet the programme itself had little impact. A key issue discovered by Devins and Johnson is one of dead weight i.e. the businesses that got involved would have engaged with MTD anyway and the 04 programme seems to have attracted these businesses with a 10-49 employee base while it was the smaller firms and micro businesses that did not get involved with formal training of this sort. The findings of Matlay (2004) suggest the distinct advantage of flexibility in relation to change. This allows the taking advantage of opportunities in the new global economy and is reflected in the mismatch between specific small business training needs and the service (including courses and programmes) on offer. SMEs are not homogenous and there is no consistent definition of an SME therefore there is a need to deal with the diversity of the SME environment (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999). There is still a lack of skills and competencies, for example to analyse market conditions, because of this training and investment policy is flawed (Massey, 2004). An important consideration in some cases might be that owner-managers might want to maintain a certain lifestyle and not go for growth (Smith et al, 1999), which makes sense in the light of the reasons why some people start a business in the first place.

Experiential learning, curriculum and delivery

The literature suggests that individual student differences cannot be ignored, but the interaction between teaching and learning is quite subtle (for example Entwistle, 1984). Teaching and learning can involve the simulation of reality by working on real live problems in the classroom or workplace and perhaps the use of a set of individuals in the problem solving process.

Experiential learning

Consideration of learning per se as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter is beyond the scope of this thesis. However since learning can be achieved through activities which are relevant to the students' daily lives and which use their experiences, experiential learning seems important to the context under investigation here. Experiential learning (Kolb and Fry, 1975, Kolb, 1984) involves simulation and can include live problems and can be workplace based in situ. Using real life situations or prior theoretical material to visualise theoretical information is at the heart of this process (McGuigan and Weil, 2007). Kolb and Fry (1975) had arrived at processes where experiential learning means that experience is the source of learning and development. The model is commonly known as the Kolb Experiential Learning model and has been used and applied to many situations and contexts such as that of McGuigan and Weil (2007). Kolb himself has recently reviewed previous research (Kolb, Boyatzis and Mainemelis, 2000). The original model is illustrated below:

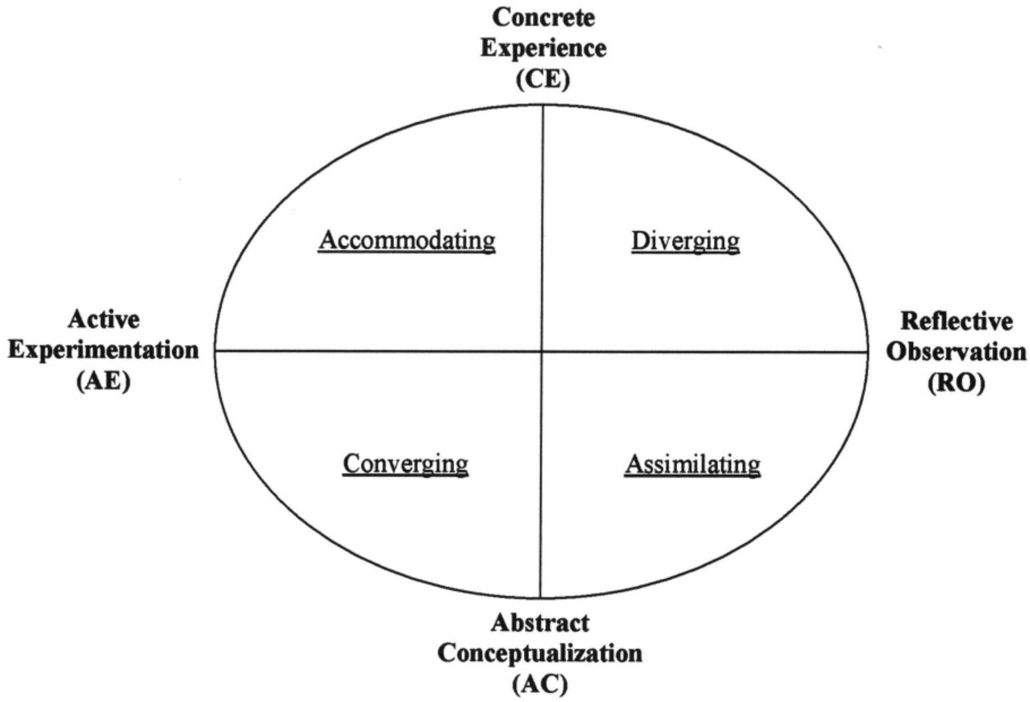

Figure 4.1: The Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle and Basic Learning Styles. From Kolb, D. A. (1984), Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, p.141.

Learning styles

In this theory, people develop preferences for different learning styles in a similar way to the way they develop any other sort of style such as management, leadership or negotiating. The model provides a framework for identifying students' learning style preferences. The theory starts with concrete experience (a learning event that is real or simulated). In a clockwise fashion the experience is followed by personal reflection (reflective observation where the learner looks back on the experience and a theoretical base is acquired i.e. what has been learnt). Then there is derivation of general rules describing the experience or applying theories to it (abstract conceptualisation, which may start as an individual thing but develop into a group exercise with others). Then there is construction of the next occurrence (active experimentation, for example actually plan the case study task if that is the learning event). We are then back to concrete experience (where in the example of a simulation such as a case study, insights into the work environment are acquired).

Skills development

The learner, however, might enter the process at any of the four points and the developmental process will happen quickly or more slowly depending upon the learner. The tutor can then monitor the learner's development around the circle. In a typical classroom situation, a case study may be used with group work and the use of group meetings, minutes of meetings, reflective journals and so on where solutions are arrived at through tutor facilitation and skills are developed in this way (McGuigan and Weil, 2007). It is learning that is achieved through reflection upon everyday experience and is the way that most of us do our learning. We should be careful not to only include primary experiences, because secondary experiences can be equally as valid in learning experientially.

Generalising

The learner can anticipate what would follow from the action and then can understand the general principle. Generalising can then occur over a number of circumstances and the experience then builds by connecting events. Then this can be applied to a new situation. Rather than a circular cycle, the process is more like a spiral movement. The use of concrete experience to test ideas and use of feedback to change practices and theories is the essence of what has become known as the Kolb model. The model has not cognition but the role of experience in learning at its heart. As with many typologies, there is recognition that to be cast in one style is missing the fact that learners might be in different modes in different situations. Styles may be more integrated than it may appear in the model. The reflective part is unspecified and the learning environment including cultural aspects needs to be taken into account. For example, the notion of self is different in different cultures. The model provides a teaching and learning framework that helps understanding of learning difficulties and consequent academic and vocational support requirements. Since learning is a process not a product the exercise does not always lead to a correct answer, but rather a continuous, grounded experience. Within Kolb, students can learn from each other in an upward spiral and therefore learning within this can be a social process where there is resolution of conflict between opposing viewpoints. Learning is a holistic process within Kolb's learning framework where there are transactions between individuals and the environment and knowledge is created and built upon (McGuigan and Weil, 2007). Learning styles are seen as important but beyond the scope of this thesis and are therefore seen as part of further research.

The SME context and 'learning to learn'

In the context of this thesis, the learner will be the owner-manager, other managers, directors or staff of the SME whose goals can be helped to be achieved by the integration of theory and practice. Theory will not be learned in isolation. Rather it is learned in a relevant context that will in itself have a motivational effect on learning, especially when the learner is allowed to reflect on activities undertaken. For Thorpe and Jones (1985):

"A period of reflection is an essential element of the learning process in order that the learning that takes place as a result of experience is captured and retained. These captured, learnt experiences are often transferable to other situations and the process is often helpful for managers as a development activity frequently described as a mechanism of helping managers 'learn to learn'".

(Thorpe and Jones, 1985:13)

Adults who have been out of touch with learning can often improve their educational performance dramatically if they are helped by 'learning to learn', which is for Nisbet and Shucksmith (1984:16) 'a topic which will surely be a dominant theme in the years that lie ahead'. They suggest a requirement for an early introduction to the practice of monitoring one's learning and the capacity to call it into play in deciding how to tackle the task. Nisbet and Shucksmith are concerned with a 'seventh sense' or 'metacognition' that they describe as being:

"an awareness of one's own mental processes, the capacity to reflect on how one learns, how to strengthen the memory, how to tackle the problems systematically".

(Nisbet and Shucksmith, 1984:16)

Both SME and ETD people can benefit from consideration of the learning process as discussed above since it provides a framework in which to work and take some control over learning. This is the key to development for SME managers and for ETD practitioners where for Copley (1989):

> "there may very well be a requirement to help them learn to learn but this might also be coupled with a requirement to help them learn in the context of the eventual settings in which knowledge and skills will be applied."
>
> (Copley, 1989:31)

Implications for teaching and learning in SMEs

A flexible diet to meet objectives

In the context under study in this thesis, age and experience vary and working with others can become important. It is clear there is no one best method of teaching or learning and much has been written on the pros and cons of each. For Thorpe and Jones (1985), the more important point is that educational objectives must meet student needs. To do this the teacher must become less of a provider of information and more of an expert in learning methods and resources required. This means a flexible diet to meet objectives so that cognitive (knowledge), emotional/psychodynamic (attitudes) and practice/participation (skills) objectives are met as required. In this, Thorpe and Jones (1985) assume the ultimate goal is to improve business effectiveness that may or may not be the case. Whatever the goals are, a key area is that of control in terms of the learner and his/her participation. Brown and Atkins (1988) provide a clear picture of the degree of control the provider or the learner has regarding different methods of delivery. At one extreme they place the lecture (where the learner has no control and the provider all) and at the other, private study (where the situation is reversed). This has substantial meaning for ETD since pressure is on resources and any move toward directed private study may prove difficult, even folly.

A social component to experiential learning

Taylor and Thorpe's (2004) social and conversational model of experiential learning, here learning and influence are part of an ongoing negotiated process, challenges the view that the learner should be viewed as an intellectual Robinson Crusoe. They argue that even when the individual reflects, thoughts have a real social character. Networks in the business development process are complex and involve domestic, voluntary, commercial and professional relations. Entrepreneurs are individuals, but are so in a social context of networks and personal relationships, where decisions are made and problems are solved not in isolation, but in a collective, through people. There is a need for more support practices to enhance real development for key actors such as accountants, but also there is a need to develop networking capabilities. Taylor and Thorpe (2004) also advocate a biographical approach which employs an effective tool in the critical incident. This is a technique that highlights the role that networks play in knowledge development and transfer (Deakins and Wyper, 2006). Learning is therefore a process of co-participation and depends on socio-cultural and historical factors where reflecting, theorising, experiencing and action are viewed as different aspects of the same process, but not as steps in a process. In this sense, it is a departure from the Kolb approach discussed above. Social network analyses can be used to view relationship data and critical incidents or events can be used as learning episodes. These are higher levels of learning than more formal, passive processes and can change the learner's behaviour (Deakins and Wyper, 2006).

Skills to manage networks

Deacons and Wyper (2006) suggest that the skills to manage social networks are innate, but later these become more informed and honed as the learner develops. This does depend on the entrepreneur or SME principal as learner and their maturity, ability and willingness to self-reflect from interactions with the environment. It has been suggested by Cope (2005) that the learner has to learn about the business, small business management, the environment and enterprise networks and the nature and management of relationships. Critical incidents or learning events (crises, shocks or jolts that lead to higher levels of learning) and the social characteristics of entrepreneurial learning for Cope (2005):

> "represent integrative, over-arching dimensions of a dynamic learning perspective of entrepreneurship".

(Cope, 2005:374)

Learning is dynamic

Cope (2005) suggests that entrepreneurship is a dynamic phenomenon and being an entrepreneur is clearly not the same as running a small business, but the two are not incompatible either. Learning for entrepreneurial and ordinary small business people can be equally as dynamic. Both can engage with continued learning and development, especially in relation to the wider business environment. It is what entrepreneurs do rather than what they are in terms of personality traits, the study of the latter being, for Cope, a rather static approach. It is perhaps more worthwhile to look at the complex ways they learn in relation to salient contextual variables, the ways in which they negotiate the management and growth of businesses and the acquisition of knowledge and skills in order to create, manage and grow an enterprise. It is in this sense that ordinary small business owner-managers can learn from the behaviours of entrepreneurs, for both lifelong learning and development is extant, and linked to prior learning. As Cope (2005:384) underscores; 'as adult learners we are caught in our own histories'. The higher level learning achieved through critical learning events and the 'school of hard knocks' combined with lower level, routinised, adaptive learning provide both a 'thinker and doer' learning journey.

Skills and curriculum for SMEs

A sense of control

The typical small firm owner-manager is unlikely to be interested in ETD for its own sake. Anything offered has to be for the company good where problem solving is critical if the SME principal is to value education and training. Place, time and pace are crucial. In ETD terms two goals are evident; cognitive accumulation of knowledge, as with, for example, marketing and behavioural improvement of skills. The overall personal sense of controlling the future and will to achieve/succeed (Cachon, 1987) leads in turn to two types of input; time devoted to psychological preparation for a major career change and basic skills, as with, for example, legal regulations. Start-ups are thought to require a general approach and existing businesses a tailored approach (Kirby, 1988). The latter would involve adaptive, diagnostic tactical skills in order to mitigate the consequences of change. Change can be exploited and this scenario displays similar characteristics to a scenario involving entrepreneurship. A conscious grafting of administrative to entrepreneurial skills and capabilities would be necessary and would follow. Lowden (1983) illustrates the different types of such skills. For example, a typical administrative skill would be organising, whereas, a typical entrepreneurial skill would be trouble-shooting. Somewhere in the middle are skills that are both administrative and entrepreneurial, for example, information processing which requires both the assimilation of information and judgement as to what is necessary and relevant.

Preventive medicine for the whole business

By the middle to late 1980s, the literature suggested that little change had occurred since The Bolton Report of 1971 regarding management problem solving. A main message from Bolton was effectively a call for preventative medicine rather than having to call the doctor whereby the small firm's manager is best served when taught to help himself (Lessen, 1979) to, for example, cope with sales and marketing or do one’s own bookkeeping. Tait (1988) went further arguing for an interactive approach/perspective, where the owner/manager is more concerned with the business as a whole rather than discrete functions/difficulties. Gibb’s (1983) hierarchy of needs is based on a social development process, where acquiring motivation, finding the idea, validating the idea, identifying sources, negotiating to get into business and birth and survival are seen as the (linear) way to build a management framework. At the same time, this work acknowledges and argues for different programmes at different stages of the business life cycle and therefore, the need for different inputs (Gibb, 1983).

Learning environments and delivery of ETD for SMEs

Flexible learning delivery

There are delivery issues within a supportive environment for SMEs where the key to successful delivery of learning is flexibility (Bathie, 1985). The modes of delivery range from the formal course to open/distance/flexible learning. There are clearly pros and cons but there are also input issues within whatever form of delivery is decided upon (Brown and Atkins, 1988). It is clear that the learning environment in which the SMEs and their players are immersed at any time will have an effect on perceptions of what is taking place and how it is taking place. The debate over what to deliver as reported earlier in this chapter in terms of skills for SMEs is still a fluid one. It has been argued that competence has won over examinable knowledge, but there are also differences between technical and managerial skills and there is still the question of measurement (Smith et al, 1999).

Social learning delivery

Social factors and interaction, even within the classroom (and especially with group work), make the learning process more than the one way transmission of information as is apparent in the teacher to learner lecture scenario. MNVQs appear to be able to deliver more than technical skills depending upon how well learning is delivered (Smith et al, 1999). However, these are unacceptable in terms of SME managers who, if they are to seek accreditation at all, appear to want to do so via some form of diploma in management like the DMS, or at a slightly higher level, a University-awarded MBA or other masters award. SME managers appear uninterested in accreditation per se (Matlay, 2004). The social character of learning comes into the equation and is possibly incompatible with an NVQ-type approach to learning. The community of practice (CoP) for the SME manager is important. In the CoP, social interaction is a critical component of scheduled (and unscheduled) learning. Therefore, a learning plan requires interaction and collaboration. For Clarke et al (2006:444) while 'it appears that the social dimension of SME learning is integral to effective SME learning through active engagement with others in context', this is not always going to be available. When it is, this will involve co-participation (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004). Cooperation might take the form of alliances, trade association activities, conferences and other social and professional circles where learning is often experiential (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). Clarke et al's (2006) paper is a good example of the kind of social learning that has been around for some time i.e. action learning. Clarke et al argue that the most effective way for SMEs to learn is through social networks and opportunities. If these are naturally lacking then they can be created. For Clarke et al (2006:445) one way is through action learning that uses 'small groups facilitated by a set adviser' where 'reflection and discussion' can be used to solve problems that are 'real world issues….embedded in the owner-manager's environment'.

Social learning delivery is part of social construction of knowledge (Clarke et al, 2006, Cope, 2005) involving active perception in authentic situations. This is linked to SME networking (Clarke et al, 2006, Taylor and Thorpe, 2004) and is returned to later in this chapter.

The nature of ETD in marketing and SME marketing

The contextualisation of marketing and marketing education is not a new phenomenon and lies at the heart of this thesis as does critical thinking and reflection.

Marketing education and critical reflection

Critical reflection in marketing programmes

Critical reflection has long been seen as essential to management i.e. not just critical evaluation of choices of marketing management for, say, improvements, but rather seeking ‘alternative modes of thought and behaviour’ from which a standpoint is created (Brennan 2000:4). Unfortunately, the vocational orientation in curriculum design demanded by students and employers (Brennan, 2000) and in practice by many lecturers and trainers means that the horizons are not extended. Full advantage of ethics, semiotics, and many other potential inputs is not taken. The simplistic standpoint taken is rather like that of the problematic notion of students as the sovereign consumer where educational responsibilities are abdicated in favour of meeting consumer need. It would be a mistake to make the student, as consumer, king as you might as well simply sell them the degree, or at best provide some very basic, vocational inputs that they say they need. The argument that employers want this also is a superficial one. In addition, most courses are still designed with general, orthodox marketing in mind (Brennan, 2000).

Coates and Koerner’s (1996) work on undergraduate expectations as to the kind of inputs there should be on business degrees, is used by Brennan (2000:3-4) to argue the counter point. That is, just because a sample of past business studies students (as used by Coates and Koerner) decried the inclusion of behavioural science inputs that were never used in practice, does not mean that these kind of inputs are useless or worse. Rather, the argument for the provision of preparation for technical skills misses the idea that has ‘vociferous support’ in the literature i.e. the incorporation of critical reflection in order to counter the ‘narrow vocationalism in which functional and technical skills crowd out a critical perspective’ (Brennan, 2000:4). The danger is that students will resist anything perceived to be ‘theoretical’ or ‘impractical’ or ‘irrelevant’ and go for the readily served up diet of things that can be immediately applied (regardless of depth of benefit). At the same time, the very concepts from psychology and other social sciences that are central to a critical perspective on management are rejected (Brennan, 2000:4).

Over-emphasis on practice in marketing education

In marketing education there has been, for Burton (2005), an over-emphasis on practice. What Burton sees is a lack of critical approaches to marketing theory that can then be linked to marketing practice. Rather, the traditional (orthodox) marketing theory to practical application has dominated. Critical approaches in management education have seen student-teacher power relations re-imagined (as with many other situations, for example the patient as consumer to the doctor). Being able to think in critical ways and to critically reflect in marketing and marketing education is vital, but unfortunately, the perceived managerial relevance (or lack of it) is a difficulty on the part of executives who come to training programmes to be charmed and entertained at the expense of rigour (Burton, 2005). Alternatively, perhaps the tension comes from managers wanting advice that can be of use on the job tomorrow and teachers who want to do more but would receive poor ratings. Rigour and relevance are required not rigour versus relevance (Burton, 2005).

Thinking critically

Thinking critically clearly reflects the real life working situations managers are in so that this can help managers create novel solutions (Brownlie, 1997) where informed Critical Theory can have a great deal to offer. For this reason Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens (1999) call for critical marketing studies to be included in the marketing curriculum. This would mean a radical change taking a lead from critical management education. Critical Theory, as discussed in chapter three of this thesis, brings forth emancipatory intent but also brings the danger of self-occupied, intellectual work that is isolated from real world concerns. On the one hand, this work might not go beyond academic journals and elitist status. On the other hand Catterall, Maclaran and

Stevens (1999) claim a space for politics, morality and other such inputs on the marketing curriculum. This would require critical reflection where experiences are thought about in the wider social contexts. The failure of marketing academics to take advantage of their position to think more critically and move away from ‘how to’ marketing and embrace the postmodern condition and to see the primacy of gender, ecology, race, politics, morality, ethics and other social issues is obvious to see from university marketing curricula. The barriers to the adoption of critical reflection can be seen therefore in the adherence to orthodox marketing. There is some criticism in Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens’ (1999) work for Critical Theory itself, which while claiming an emancipatory outlook (including an avoidance of the false consciousness of management science) suffers from a form of false consciousness in that it fails to recognise (even denies) other branches of critical studies such as feminism or radical ecology. The task is to incorporate critical reflection into the marketing curriculum, not just to add it on:

“Bringing the personal into the academic is a very feminist thing to do and not always appreciated by other critical theorists”

(Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 1999:352)

Rather than Kolb alone, the critical reflection model encourages students to debate their experiences within:

“larger social systems and studies so that power plays and relations and competing vested interests within the group are identified as a microcosm of wider society.”

(Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 1999: 352)

Critically reflective practice would provide new ways of seeing and doing marking, resulting in moving marketing forward as a discipline. The question is, is this an acceptable proposition in the SME marketing ETD context?

Teaching and learning in SME marketing

The nature and characteristics of SMEs

The nature and characteristics of the SME and its principals is key and was dealt with in chapter three of this thesis. Such players do not look at all like the large firm manager and the literature suggests that the small firm manager has a loathing of planning ahead and a preference for a spider's web approach i.e. open, unstructured and informal (Curran, 1988). Therefore, providers must help solve problems i.e. meet very different managerial needs than those of the big firm manager that the modernist paradigm seemingly caters for.

Complex programmes of learning and differing levels of skills

Distinct areas in terms of learning and teaching can be highlighted. In a study of small business owner-managers (Copley, 1989) it was found that a more complex programme of learning than mere knowledge transfer is required if small firms are to be helped to develop. This should go beyond training and whilst there are limits to resources and programmes will have to at least be seen to be cost-effective, small firms need to be helped to be adaptive. To this end, programmes should facilitate the grafting on of managerial skills for development as well as providing skills to fill administrative gaps. Carson and Gilmore (1999) highlight entrepreneurial, managerial and technical-functional roles that the key small firm manager must assume for managerial effectiveness. Thus, a fusion of varying types of skills or competencies across a spectrum are necessary but not always possible within one individual. Carson and Gilmore conclude that the manager has to be capable of adaptation of marketing techniques and seem to indicate that this is part of overall skills development. Carson and Gilmore (1999) advocate the need for a spectrum of skills, but focus on experiential knowledge which should be developed proactively and conclude by questioning the appropriateness of teaching and learning methods currently being used by providers which, presumably, will not facilitate this vital outcome.

Delivering marketing ETD to SMEs

Apart from the traditional methods of delivery of ETD to SMEs such as courses, workshops and seminars, other methods have emerged over the last 20 years that are worthy of note.

Social interaction and networking

Social interaction is of great importance in SME ETD. Speakers at events have to be credible for social influence to take place both at the personal and business development levels. This should not occur by accident but should be built in to programmes and continually fostered. One of Carson and Gilmore's (1999) three marketing fundamentals is network marketing, as discussed earlier in this thesis, that allows the firm to be viewed within its social context that, they maintain, has been neglected by both traditional marketing and traditional entrepreneurship. It may be fair to say that the advent of relationship marketing has changed this position somewhat. However, networks are not the same as relationships. Networking helps deal with the lack of marketing specialists, helps with skills, helps deal with the haphazard way SMEs operate and is flexible, informal and common sense (Gilmore et al, 2006). SME owner-managers should therefore encourage staff to network but for them to do this they must develop skills. In this sense networking is a marketing competence (Carson, Gilmore and Grant, 2001) and is part of a ‘complex whole’ of competencies (Gilmore and Carson, 1996:41). Such management competencies are needed for ‘improving the quality of marketing decision-making’ (Carson and Gilmore, 1996:39). The development of competencies is, for Birdthistle (2006), critical.

One of the ways SMEs develop skills and competencies for performing tasks such as taking decisions is to experiment, try out new ideas and learn from experience as discussed above with experiential learning. SMEs can develop, through the ‘transformation of experience’; distinctive competencies such as motivation (Carson and Gilmore, 1996:43, McPherson, 2007) and networking can have a role to play in this (Simpson, Padmore and Taylor, 2005). Teaching people how to network and develop other competencies might be achieved via short, sharp course with accreditation but NVQs have not worked well. On top of all of this, owner-managers need to work out how to hand over networks to other people (Gilmore et al, 2006).

Networking is people-oriented and can be habitual but both passive and proactive (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). Networking may change due to changing personal needs and is built upon established contacts from prior experience (Gilmore et al, 2000). The extent of proactive use of networks by the small firms' manager is debatable and must depend upon the skills/competencies of the individual to begin with. There is movement from being reactive in the early stages to proactive in later stages (Gilmore et al, 2000). Carson and Gilmore (1999) see networking as an essential part of the existence of the small firm. For Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001) networking is key and an end in itself, because of resource issues, in terms of competency development. Often the cost of networking is hidden within everyday operation (Gilmore, Carson and grant, 2001) and networking 'adds value' to 'management activities in attaining and sustaining strategic advantage' (Gilmore et al, 2000:415). For Stokes (1999), if they prefer networking and interactive marketing methods then they will welcome this as part of ETD. This seems to be the case with, for example, a preference for informal networking as opposed to formal marketing research as a means to building information. Williams and Turnbull (1999) add that entrepreneurs can give something back to education and training where they are concerned that students should be able to apply knowledge rather than simply accumulate it. This does suggest, however, a kind of mistrust on the part of small firm managers/entrepreneurs of the ability of providers to put theory into practice themselves. It may be that many of the more formal ETD schemes available to support SMEs are overly structured or too inflexible and perhaps delivered half-heartedly in a too theoretical or academic way. Networking may be a more naturalistic approach to teaching and learning and very good in itself but very poor on programmes i.e. it is not easy to teach someone how to network (De Faoite et al, 2004).

The Internet

It is likely that as the business develops, different kinds of programme will be required. The traditional course is most likely to be the favoured mode of delivery, especially for start-ups and micro businesses and this perhaps helps define the difference between these and SMEs in the ETD sense. The delivery of programmes is in a state of flux. In particular, the Internet as a tool of learning appears on the horizon as something with great potential, especially given the problems this kind of learner might have with traditional learning packs and other open/distance learning material. Of course, the Internet and on-line learning brings with it other kinds of problems such as lack of contact and isolation. However, the pressure on resources makes directed private study an attractive proposition in any educational setting but this is not without its detractors. For Maclaran and Catterall (1999) access to the World Wide Web (WWW) for education purposes has so far been undirected. Theirs is a belief in a co-operative learning process between student and tutor because of the rapidly changing nature of the WWW. Clearly, the use of web sites for delivery of course material is well under way and Maclaran and Catterall (1999) put up a good, if simplistic, case for this use at that time i.e. 1999. The important point in their paper, however, is what they call interconnectivity - linkages to many other things such as journals, markets, professional bodies, and banks of educational material - all for learning support. Whilst not without its problems - for example over-reliance on particular journals - there are without doubt advantages to all of this.

New offerings should be a vast improvement on learning packs and certainly undirected learning. However, within the context of the learner here, the SME manager, learning objectives and pedagogical considerations are different from for those involving the mainstream student. The SME learner, more than most, is the opposite of the passive learner of the past. The expected move away from transmission models toward interactivity through use of the Internet and other networks should be of particular value to this context. However the social aspect of learning is clearly important to SMEs, despite the view that the classroom will be wherever the student is with the WWW providing opportunities to individualise their education, by learning anywhere and at their own pace (Maclaran and Catterall, 1999). It is perhaps not too surprising that SMEs have been slow to take up the Internet as a learning tool but there is the likelihood that the Internet is used to build contacts and in that sense, it is part of networking as discussed in chapter three. Blackburn and Athayde (2000) found that SMEs were slow to take up Internet training, which was unexpected in the EU sponsored ADAPT training initiative. Small firms exploit the opportunities provided by the Internet to reach niche markets but it may still be a question of finding the right training that suits their needs. The firms involved in Blackburn and Athayde's study were engaged with exporting and were likely to be using email and the Internet as a source of information and of course, to trade on-line but a conclusion here is that SMEs need consultancy advice on electronic commerce.

Knowledge Transfer Partnership

The old Teaching Company Scheme has now been replaced by the Knowledge Transfer Partnership but this is still designed to help the limited resources of SMEs and is a valuable part of the support infrastructure, especially to struggling SMEs (Sparrow, 1999). SME managers do not necessarily lack the ability to think strategically but they can benefit from a better approach to analysis if the resource is available. SME managers do things differently in terms of the more conventional marketing decision-making practices of large companies (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). Marketing is by no means a priority in some SMEs (Fuller, 1994) and poor marketing practice including planning and implementation leads to small business failure (Hogarth-Scott et al, 1996). SMEs have to be innovative and entrepreneurial to compete. The Knowledge Transfer Partnership scheme is designed to advance business growth through providing resources but also learning. It is an intervention to improve performance to give competitive advantage through market-based learning (Hult, 1998).

Mentoring and coaching

Other methods of more informal ETD include mentoring and coaching. For Peel (2004:46) SME's organisational imperatives are affected by 'culture and its impact, the prevalence of owner-managers in setting behavioural standards and the company perception of external consultants'. Peel suggests that on balance SMEs are reluctant to seek any form of external advice, but if they were to, the preference would be within an existing relationship. Informal learning is preferred to 'formal or accredited learning intervention' (Peel, 2004:49). Like many things with SMEs, for coaching and mentoring to work there would have to be proof of benefit and lack of bureaucratic procedure.

Mentoring, for Bretherton, Thompson and Hyland (2006), is all about the SME or small business manager taking wise counsel, is part of enabling, is a reality check used to arrive at key decisions and to help team build. Successful business people who want to give something back are often the choice of mentor for start-ups for growth, providing leadership and guidance rather than actually taking ownership of the problem (Bretherton, Thompson and Hyland, 2006). There are a variety of mentoring roles proposed by Bolton and Thompson (2004) such as the sculptor who crafts or the diplomat who reconciles tensions. The mentor sees the bigger picture, is usually established in business but not necessarily someone with big business experience, and is a sounding board that helps makes sense of what the mentee/learner already knows. The mentor offers one-to-one impartial advice but will not tell the learner what to do, whereas a coach will. In a study of Irish family SMEs (Birdthistle, 2006), it emerged that senior family members become mentors to newer, less senior family members. These family members can learn from each other.

Coaching is, for Champathes (2006), a two way communication process and is a contribution to the coachee achieving personal objectives and this can be life coaching or for the business. Coaching in marketing is rather like a sports coach where help is on hand to diagnose what is ‘going on in the battlefield’ (Champathes, 2006:17), what can be improved and how to improve it. Coaches might not perform as well as their learners but they should know how to improve the learner’s performance. Coaching is used for negotiation and interpersonal skills and other higher order management skills so that coaches need complex and comprehensive skills, high task identity and tacit knowledge (Champathes, 2006). For coaching to work the coachee/learner needs to have been prepared before coaching begins in order to avoid a negative outcome (argument or denial) and gain a positive one (acceptance and adjustment). The coaching relationship needs setting up in terms of needs clarification. There is also a need for planning in terms of the setting, monitoring and evaluation of objectives (Champathes, 2006).

Mentors and coaches can also be business angels who actually invest and are willing to mentor or coach on personal and/or business needs. Sage (2002) suggests this can be combined with networking to establish a network of members who engage in social activity. This can help maintain contact and avoid lack of feedback and also enhance knowledge transfer and build skills within networks. The mentees/coachees might also be managers within a firm who can be helped to be leaders, innovators and motivators and not merely technical managers. Such people are, for Sage (2002) in the best position to develop views on innovation, have an impact on informal networks, be aware of employee morale and have a key role in change. They can be the agent of change, control workload, encourage creative thinking, influence skills and motivate others aided by peer group monitoring, follow-ups and intranet communications (Sage, 2002). However a key problem is highlighted by Peel (2004) in that coaching and mentoring is possibly the antithesis of the command and control culture found in SMEs. Peel (2004:52) suggests that modelling – skills based training and 'a variety of other facilitative techniques including discussion, demonstration and feedback' – is the solution within a coaching and/or mentoring programme.

Co-joining of the mix and relationship marketing

There may very well be something in the notion that mix and relational approaches can be co-joined. Clearly the mix exists, but it is the tablets of stone adherence to an apparently unmoveable marketing mix feast that causes problems. There are possibilities, also, to go beyond this. For example Brennan (2000), feels the need to look toward ethics (dealt with to a certain extent in traditional texts) and power in terms of intra-organisational power asymmetry.

Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the nature and role of ETD/MTD in relation to SME marketing. It has considered the role of the EDAs in all of this. Consideration of the Kolb experiential learning process has been made. Learning in the SME marketing context, programme components and delivery have been visited in the context under study. Chapter five that follows is the research methodology of this thesis that includes an explanation of the data collection method and the tool of analysis (Discourse Analysis) employed.

CHAPTER FIVE - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter is an account of the epistemology and ontology that I take in this thesis. This perspective is assisted by the development of a methodology applied in the chosen context that is rich in data, with a view to contrasting this with the available inquiry from the literature in the discussion chapter. The methodology developed is described as interpretive (Fisher 2004) rather than positivist. The creation and analysis of particular socially constructed arenas is central to this study, and is concerned with everyday life in a particular context to understand the multiplicity of meaning in such a context (Elliot, 1996). The data collection method used was the semi-structured interview. The method of analysis chosen was Discourse Analysis. The use of a Discourse Analysis lens fits with the desired social research inquiry. This chapter, therefore, necessarily deals with an explanation of the subjective research strategy that is employed in an interpretivist fashion to arrive at rich, thick description (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The form of Discourse Analysis employed in this thesis uses interpretive repertoires (accounts that are evidence of underlying processes, after Potter and Wetherell, 1987) that support the themes that emerge from the research texts created. The chapter deals with the collection and analysis of data, together with an explanation of how such methods fit in with the practicalities, limitations and ethical considerations inherent in the research. Reflexivity (dealt with in more depth in chapter eight) explains the approach taken.

Research philosophy

The choice of research philosophy in this thesis is driven by my assumptions about realities (both ontological and epistemological) of the context under study and is therefore subjective (Crotty, 1998). From this philosophical stance there is not one truth but many truths based on personal experiences (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and the existence of multiple realities (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). My personal experiences have led me to a particular position with respect to the context under study so that it is my individual, subjective view that matters. The research seeks to highlight shared meanings of individuals in socially constructed arenas (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

The way I first saw it, in simple terms, was that I was looking through a restaurant or pub window and seeing the diners or drinkers inside. I knew who they were but did not know how they viewed the world and the only way of getting those views was to enter and to set up some form of social intercourse. Qualitative research helps to focus on actual practice in situ and in this sense there is an analytically defined perspective where social interaction takes place (Silverman, 2000). In the end research texts are produced from the interview transcripts, which in turn eventually help provide the themes and discourses reported in this thesis. There is no search for true/false statements; the quest is to discover important categories and to apply them within the chosen context. In a sense these are 'social facts' (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997:47) that are socially organised within narratives, which can become everyday narratives, autobiography or biography and beyond biography, i.e., they become what are labelled research texts in this thesis. These texts are then analysed through Discourse Analysis.

The basic argument for the use of subjective means of inquiry is the belief that the separation between researcher and the entity being researched is a fiction (Hunter, 2004). Meaning is attributed to social experience. My experiences had led me to agree with Yates (2004) who links quantitative methods with positivism with a warning that this is too simplistic a way of looking at the world. This epistemology coupled with quantitative methods follow the natural science approach (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002, Knox, 2004, Ticehurst and Veal, 2000). In terms of SME marketing I felt a positivist approach to research to be an inappropriate one that would not deliver what I wanted to know. The interpretivist approach I have taken here follows that of Knox (2004) who points out that such an approach should strive for transparency to show what led to a particular understanding and reflexivity to show why the research method is being used in the particular setting. I therefore take on board value preferences and commitments for both participants and researcher. The researcher should have affinity with data regarding sources, people and theories.

Subjectivity and the social constructivist approach

My research question involves the assumption that marketing as shaped over time by large corporations offers an inappropriate set of models and frameworks to many other contexts and in particular that of the SME owner-manager. The key research question is how SME and ETD participants ‘see’ marketing and what impact this might have on the provision of ETD in the SME context. This question was guided by my own experiences as well as ideas from the literature. My move to an interpretive approach was driven, in part by my desire to recognise myself as a subjective individual. Meaning in this sense is co-constructed and re-constructed, i.e., meaning is constructed and continually adjusted over time (Crotty, 1998). This is why a social constructivist approach (the why) was appropriate to this thesis. The determinist position of structuralism where ‘any system is made up of a set of oppositional categories embedded in language’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:27) was rejected here as this would not yield what I was seeking since I was not looking for structural relationships between concepts. Nor would a poststructuralist approach be appropriate where ‘language is an unstable system of referents, thus it is impossible ever to capture completely the meaning of an action, text or intention’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:27). Meaning can only be understood in terms of the historical and cultural context, with the poststructuralist trying to understand the world dissected into parts of systems, as in deconstruction, hence rejection of the structuralist methodology.

The social constructivist (as opposed to the constructionist, Crotty, 1998) approach was chosen here because I did not have a critical, emancipatory agenda. I was seeking participants’ meaning or sense making but with myself as part of the process as a subjective researcher embracing my subjectivity (Thomas and Davies, 2005). I wanted to focus on meaning making that social constructivism would provide, rather than social constructionism’s emancipatory or critical agenda. I was intent on constructing, identifying and understanding that which constitutes knowledge (Crotty, 1998). The social constructivist approach takes subjective reports of events as told by participants based on their lived experiences that become multifaceted constructions, interpretable on many levels. These are reassuring versions of the protagonist’s own self, or of ideologies or of power relations (Billig, 1987), or versions of events built from constructions of the self and social relations (Harre, 1998). The sense of meaning given to the protagonist in terms of self is important (Mauss, 1985, Miller and Hoogstra, 1992). The ideology upon which we depend for our reassurance and sense of self, created through unconsciously selective narratives or stories of self, is thus made (Goffman, 1959). These are not conscious functions since social reality is discursively constructed. Versions of events are selected over alternatives therefore the social constructivist approach allows this sense of constructed meaning to be acknowledged in the research.

Since we continually construct and negotiate meaning to make sense of experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and we are both ideological and material (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000), social constructivism provides a place in which multiple negotiated meanings can be housed (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). The notion of socially constructed arenas is key in this thesis, where an interpretivist paradigm is then let loose. For Denzin and Lincoln (2005):

"all research is interpretivist; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied".

Denzin and Lincoln (2005:22)

Any resulting knowledge is developed through this interactive medium and interpretation of it. The informant brings baggage but so does the researcher (Pels, 2000, Crotty, 1998). Tierney (2000:550) discusses testimony, biography and autobiography in the creation of texts and argues that texts in themselves without treatment are little more than 'literary experiments or the telling of untold tales'. Tierney argues for 'not only new ways of thinking about constructing texts but different relationships with those who are studied and a different stance with regard to the "other"'. Similarly, Reed-Danahay (2001:418) on autobiography, intimacy and ethnography suggests that informants ('natives') 'will tell their own stories…to include home, self, fiction and other textual productions as well as visual culture' aided by the researcher (in this case ethnographer) to create a 'site' of research. In a similar vein, Rhodes and Brown (2005) evaluate the creative re-description of a world where hidden patterns and unexplored meanings can unfold and suggest that there are potentially many interpretations. The quest is not for truth but for meaning (to understand rather than control). Rhodes and Brown (2005:177) emphasise the ability to focus on 'the object of the study …as a singular reality'. In this thesis, I as the researcher take a place at the table in the socially constructed arena, the interview, with the participant. The researcher here does not seek to emancipate or change things but comes to the interview with an understanding and predisposition. Participants have views that might well contradict orthodox marketing norm or expectation. In this way I am part of the socially constructed reality and seek to explain and understand and then interpret the outcome that is a biography as part of the social life of the SME and ETD participants. I establish this place by placing myself in the same frame of reference as participants.

Discourses and interpretive repertoires

Discourse is a mode of thinking, is active and does things socially and politically (Potter and Wetherall, 1987). Discourse is constitutive of socio-organisational reality where it generates, reproduces and transforms the very stuff of our ideas as sentient **(**perceptive and conscious) and social beings. A discourse is understood here to be a concept or set of concepts or ideas through which meaning is provided. A discourse structures the contribution of participants in the primary research of this thesis. A discourse is not the discussion but is that which provides meaning to social and physical phenomena. A discourse is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices. In marketing terms a discourse might refer to a particular way of dealing with a particular set of problems, for example marketing through networking. In this thesis certain discourses are grouped into certain themes by allowing the discourses to emerge from the research texts after applying a form of Discourse Analysis. The themes and discourses are presented in chapter six of this thesis.

Discourses can be constructed from many things, can involve a variety of styles and rhetorical devices and can create organisational structure as well as express it. Discourse is the means to the creation of a coherent social reality, framing the sense of that which we are (Mumby and Chair, 1997:181). Realities are shaped, at least in part, by discursive practices and interactions (Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick, 1998).

Social realities or worlds provide a way of knowing and therefore involve meaning. This is an interactive place where thinking is shaped by that which exists. To understand these worlds fully interpretations that are historically and socially influenced and affected are employed. Hence the idea that these are socially constructed realities. Interpretations of different constructions and meanings are the goal of the discourse analyst (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1993). There is no clear-cut objectivity but rather something that is created by the discursive rhetoric and devices that people bring to the arena (Crotty, 1998). Building a number of discourses within a particular context is therefore seen as a satisfactory 'sample'. Each will be different but are not in conflict with each other even though a positivist would surely see this being the case. This thesis therefore involves looking at what discourses share and what is being advocated.

A simple argument here is that the participant might not be able to articulate the constructive process (Coyle, 2000). This does not mean that it does not exist but indicates the fundamental problem of articulation in relation to language. Foucault (1972:49) emphasises the constructive potential of discourses, seeing them as 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'**.** There is therefore an object that is formed, potentially, from a combination of things. If a key part of this is the biography that flows from a number of questions posed in an interview with a participant, then the linguistic repertoire is central. Such a repertoire consists of descriptive and referential terms that involve the portrayal of beliefs, actions and events (Mavin, 2001). In other words these are interpretive repertoires (Potter and Wetherall, 1987).

It has therefore been argued that the richness brought out by tools of analysis such as semiotics, ethno methodology, speech act theory or critical discourse analysis (CDA) allows for interpretations of social data through words and other devices (Banister et al, 1994). In a related fashion, van Dijk (1997) suggests that the researcher might consider the use of naturally occurring unedited text/talk as data and a focus on discourse as social practice. Van Dijk (1997) also suggests how discourse users enact to resist social and political structures and through the construction of identity pay attention to the ways social marketers interpret, categorise and construct social experience.

Crotty (1998) comments that different worlds are inhabited by different people with ways of knowing through different meanings and entities, for example meaning via culture or subculture i.e. people are shaped and conditioned or socially constructed. There is not an eternal truth. The self is socially constructed. Therefore organisations are arenas of social interaction socially constructed by people, language and labelling. This is meaning given by individuals who are different and have different experiences (Crotty, 1998, Burrell and Morgan, 1979). In this thesis I attempt to understand behaviour by being put in the same frame of reference as SME managers and managers and trainers in enterprise and development agencies.

Discourse Analysis as method of qualitative data analysis

In this thesis I analyse participants' views and experiences through a Discourse Analysis (DA) lens, allowing me to take a diverse look at my own and participants' views and experiences. This led to a deep understanding of the worldview of participants rather than the more superficial analysis that would have come from more of a 'five bar gate' kind of categorisation of responses. This lens can be viewed as a fresh pair of eyes to replace my previously positivistic ones. DA involves the 'identification of a shared system of meanings or constructions used in particular social texts' Marshall (1994:93). The rationale made earlier in this chapter for the choice of qualitative rather than quantitative approaches is in part driven by the desire to obtain a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the social arena under study. This could not be achieved in practice through the employment of a large-scale study, there being a requirement for much closer scrutiny of data. With this in mind a move toward the employment of DA was made in this thesis.

I have taken Schiffrin, Tannen and Hamilton's (2003:1) suggestion that DA can be a 'broader range of social practice that includes non-linguistic and non-specific instances of language'. This kind of DA is concerned with the social organisation of texts and therefore it is concerned with variability of accounts and interpretive repertoires (Elliott, 1996). It also involves any patterns in the data or things that are shared by differing accounts or discourses where contextual influences are identified. The skill of the interviewer-cum-interpreter is crucial here since discursive practices do not just describe, they do things and are active and have interactive implications in a particular social setting where a social reality is created. This frames the sense of what the participants are (Potter and Wetherall, 1987, Mumby and Chair, 1997).

For Coyle (2000), DA is ‘a field of enquiry’ that has evolved from domains such as speech act theory, ethnomethodology and semiology. The attractiveness of DA stems from the idea that meaning is fluid rather than static and therefore this stance contends that language embodies the ‘sediment’ of social structure and practices and is incapable of remaining neutral (Elliot, 1996:65) i.e. language is more than a representation of the word but rather it performs functions. This is based on the idea that humans only think and function within discourses where language can be seen as a basis of contradiction, paradox and contested power. For Elliot, (1996) a discourse is a system of statements that constructs an object, supports institutions, reproduces power relations and has ideological effects.

Fairclough’s linguistic approach (for example Fairclough, 2000), one of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), is rejected here principally because I am not a linguist. I was not seeking to research political and social facets competing for power where CDA can be a critical methodology and as such is a critical approach to management research (Alvesson and Wilmott, 1992a). It is the answers to social, not linguistic, questions that this discourse analyst is after i.e. the approach to DA here is more concerned with the social organisation of talk rather than its linguistic organisation (Coyle, 2000). Coyle points out that it was Potter and Wetherall (1987, 1994), in the social psychology domain, who moved away from the idea that biases (for example self-presentational effects) could be eradicated or minimised by refining data collection methods (Coyle, 2000). Rather, the texts derived from spoken responses within interview settings provide the building blocks of some form of social reality not the usual objective truths that must be out there waiting to be collected and scrutinised.

Discourse, social constructivism and the importance of variability

Discourses are concerned with action within a social construction. It was Berger and Luckman (1967) who were interested in the ways reality and social phenomena are constructed and how they become institutionalised and made into tradition. This approach is subjective, not objective, whereby human subjectivity imposes itself on those facts we take to be objective and not vice versa. Social constructivism is concerned with variability. Variability is a cultural concept because people construct versions of a social world and therefore discourse will vary depending upon what it is being used for and what its function is (Elliot, 1996). DA abandons the positivist assumption that people have a single attitude that can be represented through mutually exclusive response categories (Potter and Wetherall, 1987). For Hackley (1998) DA is non-cognitive and the social constructivist approach is in opposition to that of the cognitivist. The social constructivist approach seeks a mutual theory of meaning, while the cognitivist approach has a private constitution. With the social constructivist approach there is no reflection of underlying attitudes or dispositions. The focus is on the 'inter-subjective constitution of the mind as a person', which 'converses with another or with others' (Elliot, 1996:66). For Elliot this is social practice not individual perception and is not the same as other interpretive methodologies. It is, rather, accepting of the 'poststructuralist assumptions of language as the site of the construction of a social world replete with contradiction, paradox and contest' (Elliot, 1996:66).

Lessons from applications in research into management and marketing

There are relatively few studies in marketing that employ DA but this is not to say there is a paucity. In managerial terms there are many more. In Human Resource Management for example, there is a move away from naïve models of managerial motivation and control in terms of organisational behaviour toward the deep structure of realities, rather than the assumption that the key to a material universe of casual and determined relationships can be found in more positive orientations. Work has been done in the area of managerial experience as a socially constructed situation with social forces (as reported in Bryans, Mavin and Waring, 2002) and seeking to understand how managers make socially constructed sense of the organisational innovation process (Coopey et al, 1997). Studies in the marketing area do exist. For example Elliot et al (1995), on sexuality in advertising, maintain women used humour while talking about sex and men, which drives down or diffuses anxiety, allowing them to deal with the subject matter, whereas with men there was no need for humour to discuss sex but rather the focus was on the motivations of advertisers and creative techniques used. This seemed to help men seem well informed and serious about the subject. Studies have been conducted on health reform advertising (Morgan et al 1994) and on the language of customers (Fairclough, 1990). Other studies have involved persuasion, ideology, conflict language and mission statements, company reports and press releases. There is Wright, Levson and Higgs's (1995) work on gender identities in advertising and other work on internal marketing, green/societal marketing, political marketing, marketing strategy, New Product Development, utilisation of marketing research, advertising agency relationships, sales force, and coupons/incentives.

A framework for Discourse Analysis in this thesis

An aim in this thesis is to produce research texts from biographies through inquiry and questioning as described earlier in this chapter. Potter and Wetherall (1994) find it difficult to distinguish between analysis and writing up unless discourse is seen in the context of 'process.' Czariawska (1994) suggests that DA assumes that diversity and fragmentation is expected with individuals. On a practical level the usual taping and transcription of interviews, taking of notes (including recording of non-verbal cues) and any other commentary can be written in to final transcripts. Coyle (2000) notes that there is a limit to how far one might go here, where every "um" and "uh" is detail that moves toward Conversation Analysis. Elliot (1996:66, after Potter and Wetherall, 1987) agrees and suggests that 'fine details' that are 'not crucial …can interfere with the readability of the transcript'. A key skill that the researcher needs to develop when dealing with the use of language is being able to detect inferential and interactional aspects of talk, but it is unclear exactly how this sensitivity or skill can be developed or systematized (Coyle, 2000).

Parker and Burman (1993) developed a twenty-step guide to conducting Discourse Analysis and similarly Potter and Wetherall (1987) developed a ten-stage approach, including two stages dedicated to the analytic process. Combining and rationalising these, I came up with eight guiding principles which are:

1. Emphasis on skills and expertise establishes credibility. The Discourse Analyst should be mindful of the impression that is being attempted.
2. Omissions can be a combination of two types: either things that are said that are superfluous; or what might have been said more clearly.
3. Variability in accounts and the need for the Discourse Analyst to be familiar with the context. The Analyst has to be aware of the participant coming across as having expertise on the one hand and with humility on the other.
4. Both construction and deconstruction of the self on the part of the participant.
5. Both personal and objective observations can be considered as part of the analysis.
6. Coding of issues and looking for discursive patterns helps facilitate understanding.
7. The need to look for discursive functions in terms of action, helped by an understanding of the context and broader contextual issues.
8. The need to look out for extremes that makes the position more persuasive.

(Based on Parker and Burman, 1993, Potter and Wetherall, 1987).

The framework therefore holds that the participants are in a process that is largely one of their own biographical making but is shaped and influenced by other factors such as the presence of the researcher. Analysis of the resultant text with findings (interpretations) emerging that would later be related to the literature findings in the usual way of theses and dissertations. Discourses are in this sense to the Discourse Analyst what data are to the empirical scientist and analysis with DA becomes scholarship rather than methodology (Coyle, 2000). The analysis in this thesis sees the emergence of a tapestry of BtoB SME marketing and ETD themes with discourses drawn from a range of narratives in the research texts from this particular social arena. The analysis makes sense of the participants' marketing and ETD worlds. Sample size is not an issue here (Potter and Wetherall, 1987). For Elliott (1996) the ability to take part in the research questions must drive the sampling approach. When employing DA:

"Attention must be given to the function that each account seems to be achieving in the discursive context but this is not to suggest that a straightforward study of functions must be hypothesised and become part of the discourse analysis”.

(Elliot, 1996:65)

The aim of utilising DA is to encourage diversity of response as opposed to the traditional approach where consistency is sought when interviewing (Elliot, 1996). In this study there is a deliberate goal of variability. In order to achieve this I employed certain mechanisms as recommended by Elliot (1996:66) as illustrated below:

1 Deliberate confrontational tactics, for example the use of probing during the interview, allowed me to dig deeper into the particular issues.
2 Questions become part of the text and are part of the entire process (context or social arena) and therefore part of the research texts. However, some intonations and hesitations were edited out of the transcriptions.
3 Naturally occurring social talk was deliberately constructed and Discourse Analysis applied rather than the employment of linguistic organisation of texts.
4 Variability was sought to produce interpretive repertoires, therefore the shaping of meaning occurred via a restricted range of terms emerging from each participant.
5 Rather than a fine-grained study of linguistic features the focus here is on dominant themes that emerged.
6 Patterns were sought in data in terms of functions and effects and in terms of variability of content, accounts and consistency where shared features of accounts were given.
7 The transcripts were added to in a number of ways. For example the notes I made during the interviews provided further clues as to the emphasis put on words and phrases.

The participants

The thesis does not attempt to provide a theory of SME marketing but rather I sought to explore my ideas with a small but highly relevant sample of people and make an original contribution to theory. The people chosen are relevant because they are all involved in the context. They are either principals of SMEs, have had the experience of being a principal or they work for part of the SME and smaller firm support network in the North East of England. A list of participants and some of their basic characteristics can be found in appendix III. Since confidentially is assured aliases have been used and only a flavour of the kind of people and businesses is given. All participants are presented anonymously across the thesis. The associated limitations of the study were presented earlier in the thesis.

The findings as presented in chapter six are clearly not generalisable to all SMEs. However the sample of fourteen participants, seven of each purposefully chosen from SME and ETD people in the North East of England, does provide both kinds of perspective. All were interested in marketing and I was interested in the person, not the business. For example I made the judgement to include one participant, in her early 40s, who is clearly now involved with a micro business in the kitchens, bathrooms and bedrooms supply and fitting sector. However her experience in the original family business was extensive. This was a builders merchants that had been grown within the family from scratch to three branches which had several million pounds turnover and employed more than 50 people. It was a lifestyle choice to limit the new business after the original business was sold to a major builders merchants chain as the founder retired. This participant, the wife of the son of the founder of the original business, was able to put forward views on marketing in a micro business and marketing in an SME that would fall into the definitions of micro businesses and SMEs as expressed in appendix III of this thesis.

Another participant who runs a service business that is essentially a private business club had a turnover of quarter of a million pounds in 2006. This business employs six people excluding the MD and would be classified as a micro business. However, this participant has had an impressive array of experience including owning a marketing communications company in London. This was preceded by a career in journalism ‘working for Robert Maxwell’ and followed by experience of the dot com boom in the late 1990s.

Yet another consideration relates to the experiences participants have had. The ETD participants were chosen for their role as an SME support person, but some of the seven provided an extra dimension to the data in that they were also involved with their own small firm. For example, one participant was both a trainer and developer for SMEs but also marketing manager for the EDA she was employed by. On top of this she was a partner in a micro business which was associated with a good number of SMEs in the funeral sector. Similarly some of the SME participants had experience of EDAs and SME business advising. As said, it was the person and not the current business I was interested in and made a judgement on for inclusion in the sample. Appendix III details the characteristics of participants and distinguishes between entrepreneurship, the SME and the micro business.

How the semi-structured interview (SSI) was used in this study

Why the SSI was used in this study

The SSI was used for this study because it is the best way to provide the research texts to which DA is then applied. Anything that changed during the course of the interview process was noted and used, not hidden, This and other factors such as interview questioning, issues over population and sample and honesty over interview timings are in clear view. The need to manufacture data and interpretations of data are open as this is vital for reflexivity, not only from the interviews but the whole process toward research texts and the application of DA to those texts. This process results in a move from question selection, much of which was derived from the literature, but some of which were drawn from my own experiences, to the interviews themselves and then narrative. The different voices in relation to the literature then provide the basis through narrative and emergent themes that are presented in chapter six after the application of DA to the research texts.

A degree of structure

SSIs allow the researcher/interviewer to place a degree of structure in what would be an open, free-for-all, but this technique is clearly less rigid than the structured interview schedule or questionnaire. Another way of putting this is that the interview is guided conversation that defines structure and provides freedom of narrative (Mavin, 2001). Narratives are co-produced by me and each participant (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Rather than a rigid interview schedule, there is use of a flexible interview guide that uses probes. Stories surface more naturally (Alvesson, 2002). I was willing to go in directions not thought of before and the schedule or guide became an aide-memoire relating to the preconceived issues that I subjectively took to the interview. The more interviews I conducted the less I needed the aide-memoire. In other words I led the interview yet allowed the participant do the talking and helped shape the interview within an organic framework that I controlled. I wanted the participant to have a voice so had to be careful not to abuse the power of interviewer. The guide can be found in appendix I. The same guide was used with all of the participants but it is worth noting that the first interview was exceptional. I viewed this as a pilot and it was the longest at nearly three hours. I learned from this and the guide changed, not in terms of the items but rather the probing and I was able to avoid rambling (Ardley, 2005) as discussed a little later in this chapter.

A degree of openness

SSIs allow a degree of openness within a structure that provides the opportunity to make sure that certain areas are covered during the interview. The semi-structured approach can involve a focused, problem-centred expert or ethnographic interview (Flick, 2002). The semi-structured interview schedule contains basic questions followed by probes, thus allowing informants to express themselves at length while avoiding lengthy rambling (Bell et al, 1987, Ardley, 2005). Thus the rationale behind the use of the semi-structured interviews in this research is to collect the subjective, worldview of each of the informants regarding marketing, education, training and development (ETD), management training and development (MTD) and their business or agency role.

The mechanics of the interviews

Other points worth noting are that I felt the preamble to be important so that participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and allowed space for informed consent to be given. This followed the same kind of explanation given on initial contact. Indeed, the data that includes feelings and experiences as part of the world views sought (that are related to the context of SME marketing and ETD), soon builds to a considerable size after only a few interviews. The length of interviews ranged from 36 minutes to 140 minutes. These were conducted in a private office on the participant's premises, at the Northumbria University, one in the participant's home, one in a pub and another in a car. These latter venues may seem a little unusual but this is consistent with the use of the sampling method adopted (see appendix III for an explanation of this and of the characteristics of the participants). The interviews were conducted in this manner for the convenience and at the request of the participants. All interviews, however, were private with little interruption. The environment for all was such that participants were at ease and comfortable in talking about experiences in a venue that they had chosen.

The interpretivist approach that highlights my subjectivity is in keeping with the interview technique that uses an opening question designed to begin the dialogue in an open-ended manner (Thompson and Haytko, 1997) and thereafter this interview is not in abstract but related to participant experiences. Probes informed by the research context, literature and experience were used. Participants were allowed to articulate the network of meanings that constitutes personal understanding of SME marketing phenomena, discourses and influences. This tool allowed me to share the world of others for a while. I was not seeking reliability so I knew the interview would be different each time. The sample of seven plus seven was thought enough to produce the depth required. I secured the interviews through personal contact and recommendation (see appendix III). Participants' informed consent was obtained during the briefing, which took place before the interview was granted. This briefing was conducted by telephone or email communication (or both). Examples of this section of the interview transcripts can be found in appendix II. Participants seemed to enjoy the interview process and said so. Notes taken were useful but very little was added later despite the participants being given a copy of their interview. The final research texts were mostly the interview transcript.

I viewed myself not in a covert role but in an open one, so reducing any ethical or bias impact. This was not the usual participant observation but the interviews were conducted by me openly as researcher at PhD doctoral level. People's experience of social reality in a social world cannot be understood in terms of causal relationships. The purpose of the approach taken here was to gain perceptions of marketing rather than to analyse marketing itself (Ardley, 2005). My subjective approach is autonomous, which means no attempt to corroborate my analyses and accounts with some form of outside verification was made, apart from some ‘other involvement’ (after Pels, 2000). This is part of my evaluation framework, which in turn is part of reflexivity discussed in chapter eight. The interview schedule (or guide, Ardley, 2005) contained predetermined questions. I decided not to allow too much ‘rambling’ on the part of the participants but still to allow them to do most of the talking. At the start, the preamble was designed to follow on from recruitment activities and provide some detail of the research and interview purpose. The interviews were designed to create a relaxed, trusting atmosphere with social conversation or ‘brief meditative activity’ (Ardley, 2005:116). Participants were made to feel comfortable and able to respond honestly and fully with guaranteed confidentiality in comfortable settings.

The interviews were obtained through personal contacts that sometimes snowballed. For example, I had contacted one of the EDAs and secured an interview with one of the economic development managers. He then invited me to an event they were sponsoring and put me in touch with the sponsored SME principal who became a participant in the study. At the event I met the two principals of an SME who agreed to an interview and they became a composite participant. Other interviews were secured by recommendation in a ‘have you talked to’ kind of way thus demonstrating the interest shown in this study and the SME network that exists in the North East of England (see appendix III for a fuller explanation of the sample).

Practicalities of how the research and analysis was conducted

Ethical issues (dealt with more fully towards the end of this chapter) are important in the creation of research texts. I as researcher have to remember that the participants are people and therefore the experience should be real and should not be dehumanizing**,** a-historical or de-contextualized. I made no attempt to suppress, the objective being to open up and therefore responsibility is owed to participants. On a much more practical level, the researcher has to remember that DA involves labour intensity in terms of transcription and time consuming activities. DA is a constructive and interactive process that involves value-tied technology. It is a researcher-involved process, much more than simple button pressing and it involves recordings, full transcriptions that are supplemented by informant feedback on transcripts, the use of brief open questions around what I perceive to be relevant issues and arenas where participants are encouraged to develop a view in full with little injection (Parker and Burman, 1993).

Transcript analysis

Each of the transcripts (produced in full as text) was offered to the participants (only their own transcript and not others) for adjustment and each participant was given a copy of their interview with the appropriate software in order to run the audio file. This is Acker, Barry and Esseveld's (1991) active voice, where partially taking back ownership of the biographical narrative makes it in a sense at least partially autobiographical. This also includes material that goes beyond the response to the original question, as the participant connects to ideas prompted by the question or an additional prompt that is an adjunct to the question (Johnson, 1999). In practice very little was added to the interview transcripts, but the possibility for this to happen was provided.

Data analysis

The usual cross-participant analysis was conducted but rather than simply slotting responses into boxes as might be the case with positivistic enquiry, recurrent patterns (for example a fixation on the perceived worth of paper qualifications or a favourable orientation towards basic training in the organisation) and content of the text were sought. These are interpretive repertoires that express similarities and/or differences, where an examination of variation is the goal rather than consistency being used as a pointer toward some sort of reality, thus, the importance of the possible consequences of different repertoires and the relationship between repertoires (Bryans, Mavin and Waring, 2002).

The autobiographical details given by participants were potentially added to from notes taken by me or post-interview comments made by participants. This then forms a kind of biography. In this study these biographical accounts have been labelled research texts. On analysis of these texts, themes were then allowed to emerge from the text and within each theme discourses were then sought. An interpretive tapestry of social worlds was built from narratives. This is what Czarniawska (1994) calls a new collage, labelled in this study a research text**,** created and contextualised by the author/researcher. This then provided the basis for exploration to produce discourses. This thesis follows the advice of Silverman (2000) who suggests that textual analysis should have a clear analytical approach and deeper analysis beyond mere simple coding of responses. To achieve this, the material used was limited to certain chosen data set based on a limited number of texts and hence narratives as explained earlier in this chapter.

The basic analysis of the texts is one where themes emerged from patterns discovered from what became essentially biographies of the participants' marketing lives and from the additional information added. These themes are essentially based on similarities and differences of experience and interpretation of living with marketing that was either implicitly or explicitly stated (or both). The narratives chosen were within the themes and deemed to be the best expression in a biography-plus way of issues that relate to key points in the literature. The discussions that emerged around the narratives and key points of agreement and of disagreement are thus a synthesis of the two that led to the discourses. These discourses emerged from the soup that might normally be SME marketing and ETD banter.

Analysis of research texts and emergent themes and discourses in this study

My interaction with the research texts allowed themes to emerge. As suggested by Thompson and Haytko (1997:20) there is movement between the emic and the etic i.e. 'dialectical tracking'. Once the themes were set up I worked my way through each research text seeking discourses from the narratives. Sometimes there would be just one discourse, sometimes more; sometimes one participant and sometimes more than one. Thus the basic analysis employed generates themes in relation to the literature (chapter seven, the discussion chapter of this thesis) and this seeks similarities and differences (Thompson and Haytko, 1997). Therefore the interview questions, driven by the literature and my own experience and understanding in turn produce texts that can then have DA applied to them, based on the DA framework outlined above. It is clear from this that participants can ‘articulate their place within the culture’ of SME marketing framework in terms of self and within this schema that includes ETD (Thomas and Pullen, 2000:2).

The literature itself is socially constructed reality, as is the interpretation of such literature (Grant, Keenoy and Oswick, 1998). As discussed earlier discursive practices do things and are socio-political (Potter and Weatherall 1987). DA is about the analysis of the gap between texts and contexts through interpretations of the research text since these have created a coherent social reality that is a frame of ‘who the informants are’ (Mumby and Chair, 1997:181). The lens of DA makes sense of the articulations. Thus the emergent discourses are reflective of the experiences and identity construction of the participants’ self in everyday SME marketing and business life i.e. their experiences within this context (Thomas and Pullen, 2000). Discourses emerge from a combination of written and spoken text as discussed above. The discursive practices are implicated in the creation of organisational structure and therefore in processes and the routine of behaviour. This includes the metaphor, simile, metonym and other devices that are used (Grant, Keenoy and Oswick 1998, Mumby and Chair, 1997). This thesis applies this to both SME and ETD people who use language to describe the how, the why and the when. Attention was paid to a number of salient conflicts, paradoxes and strategies of resolution. Insights into localised meaning that participants generated with SME and ETD marketing phenomena were achieved. Ideological beliefs and metaphoric conceptions were formulated, combined and reformulated, and different social/cultural discourses were allowed to emerge to create new or novel meanings. How conventional or dominant meanings and values that are perceived to exist either in society at large or from within the SME subculture are subverted (or not) was also sought.

My intentions and interventions as researcher were made clear to both the participants initially and now to the reader of the thesis. These are true stories but there are many tellings of each one. In the end there is no doubt that the material presented is biographical. Participants added little to the transcripts but notes taken were useful to understanding meaning. I as researcher structured and ordered the interview guide.

This necessarily meant that I consciously included and excluded certain things. This is partly my authorial strategy and power as researcher.

Research text analysis

Since participants are involved with constructing and reconstructing realities through self-transformation, DA was used as the method of inquiry because it is a close study of talk and final research texts in this particular SME context. The DA is therefore situated within an interpretivist approach to research that sees meaning as being socially constructed (after Berger and Luckman, 1967, as discussed earlier in this chapter) whereby such meaning is derived by me as researcher from social intercourse involving communication with others. It is clear that reality is socially constructed, but also 'maintained, adjusted and changed over time' (Wood, 1982:75).

As mentioned above, the interviews took place in confidential locations. The interviews were digitally recorded and notes were taken during the exchanges to detail non-audio occurrences. Any unusual non-audio occurrences, such as body language, enhanced the data. The research texts were created therefore from a range of sources where the transcript of the interview is added to from other data such as notes and feedback from participants. Aspects of the text analysis such as participant's emphasis on particular parts of words, laughter or any special intonations are indicated in the texts. At first it was thought that the texts would be analysed using the devices of timed pauses or gaps between words, emphasis made on words as represented in the text, for example, ***PLEASE*** (louder), inhalation representing a sigh, emphasis on part of a word, for example, ***Al****ways* (highlight), emphasis on words by stretching, for example ***p l e a s e*** (importance), and interruptions. This was done at the beginning of the first interview. This interview was nearly three hours long and it was after this that the probing in the interview guide was changed (appendix I) in order to stem 'rambling' (Bell et al, 1987, Ardley, 2005).

I realised from this interview that the pauses could have some small meaning in my situation but that the actual timing of these pauses was of no benefit to the analysis. Interruptions were noted, but again did not have a bearing on my analysis, simply because they did not affect the meaning of the narrative and hence the findings. I therefore chose to focus on the different kinds of emphasis put on words by the participants as described above and used my notes as effectively as I could to input into the analysis. For example the interviews were rich in non-verbal language and actions. The aforementioned actions such as a sigh, the thumping of a table or laughter potentially held important clues to meaning and these (as well as pauses) were used where appropriate and relevant to the analysis. This avoided the aforementioned inclusion of items that would clutter the analysis that was needed given that the 14 interviews yielded nearly 100,000 words in the transcripts alone.

Limitations of research strategy and methods

All efforts were made to minimise limitations but there are, clearly, limitations in a number of aspects of this study. Firstly, the sample size is small but this is an inherent part of the approach taken. If more interviews were added volumes of text would be generated without adding significantly to the analytic outcomes. Secondly, the interpretation of the data is problematic, but this is mediated by the employment of DA as discussed above. Additionally, the creation of research texts beyond the recorded interview, such as notes taken during the interview, enhance somewhat the data available and therefore, the research findings. There have been no problems of the sort associated with duration or time spent on interviews. Finally, there are the usual inherent limitations of the principal data collection method, the semi-structured interview, but this thesis as stated earlier does not seek to justify per se the use of either the principal data collection method or DA, but does support the employment of the SSI and DA.

A number of other observations, based around contexts, functions and effects, can be drawn generally from the literature (for example, Potter and Wetherall, 1987). The problems normally associated with the principal data collection method are perhaps exacerbated in the DA context given the emphasis place on words and sentences. Putting words into the informant's mouth, or leading, takes on a deeper significance, especially in terms of the interpretive approach to analysis taken in this study. The notion of community (belonging) can cause problems in terms of the discourse created. If, for example, criticism of a particular community is seen as 'not the thing to do', then the analyst/researcher might consider not putting the participant in this particular kind of position, or to mediate it in some way. There is often concern in research for reliability and validity but this cannot be with DA where the participant and researcher/interviewer are not independent from one and other. Reflexivity can bridge this gap where there is a need for the discourse analyst to provide coherence to the discourses. Reflexivity is discussed in greater detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

Ethical considerations

This study clearly uses questioning that raises the issue of ethics. Such issues will always be a consideration and of importance to some degree, particularly in the post-research phase with regard to what participants might expect from the research. Since the aim of the primary research is to create discourses based largely on biographical texts, this inevitably has to be dealt with.

Participants were of course offered confidentially and anonymity and aliases have been used. In no case was there a problem with presenting the full text or any aspect of the text when it came to the presentation of the narratives. In each case, I have a recorded agreement to conduct the interviews. This constitutes informed consent (see appendix II for examples of this). Participants were assured about the safety of data storage. There were no walkouts and some interviews were extended in the sense of, for example, an hour being initially offered only to find that other commitments were postponed and the interview continued well beyond the hour.

However it is noted that the participants are real people and therefore the post-interview situation has to be addressed. The employment of DA and the nature of the qualitative research approach taken means that there is a greater need, than might normally be the case, to strive for faithfulness to the participant and to eradicate bias during editing (Hycner, 1985). With findings, whether summary or not, as part of ethical inquiry, it is of huge importance that there is no misrepresentation. The inclusion of sound bites and direct quotes for authenticity and even extensive quotes where appropriate vignettes might be used are fine as long as confidentiality is not compromised. The ethical requirements of Northumbria University are adhered to in this thesis.

Chapter summary

This chapter explains the choice of subjective research. The social constructivist approach chosen is confirmed and supported by explaining the employment of interpretive repertoires. My epistemological and ontological choices are anchored in the subjective nature of the research that includes my own reflexivity, explained fully in the final chapter of this thesis. The chapter reveals how research texts are arrived at and how DA as a method of qualitative data analysis is explored and used in this thesis. It suggests a framework for analysis, along with practicalities and limitations, which are addressed in order that research texts can allow the emergence of discourses that are grouped in themes of SME marketing and ETD practice. Ethical considerations and steps taken to protect the identities of participants are explained. Chapter six which follows is the presentation of the findings that lays out the themes and discourses that emerge from the research texts.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS – THEMES AND DISCOURSES FROM THE NARRATIVES IN THE RESEARCH TEXTS

Introduction

Following the logic of the research methodology this chapter is organised into themes and accompanying discourses that emerge from the research texts. These are part of my interpretation of the narratives but this is not an attempt to quantify. This is a data reduction operation in order to present more of the data. The number of overall examples is reduced and selected examples are employed, as is the use of summarising text in which I discuss the data. Poignant examples are selected in a separation of 'wheat from chaff' kind of way so that the reader has an appreciation of where the data came from. In this chapter, I think like a writer of fictional novels. The situational validity in this process is still intact since I return to the place where data once lived; in that reality where participants are 'round not flat' (Chenail 1995:3). I, as qualitative researcher, am one of Chenail's types who 'have to work hard at developing the details of these plots so that their readers can have a sense of where the data was naturally occurring when it was originally encountered' (Chenail 1995:3-4). Thus through a qualitative, subjective, and social constructive approach I have encountered a more rounded version of participants in a particular situation than would be the case with a quantitative approach and can pass this on to the reader of this thesis.

Naturally occurring data provides for characterisation and the context provides for significant meaning in analysis. I use preceding talk, not just quotations and brief explanations to get sense of flow and a good view of the 'show' or proceedings. Juxtaposition is used with data excerpts with talk i.e. data with descriptions, explanations, analyses, and commentaries. I have recorded what I can see from the data within the framework of the necessary subjective judgement and interpretation in order to develop a holistic understanding of the research texts and the narratives within them. A search for patterns of similarities across both the SME ETD participants' research texts is undertaken. The 'etic' higher order relationships extracted from the ‘emic’ meanings expressed in the research texts reflect the transition in each research text. Emic knowledge is essential for an intuitive and empathetic understanding of a culture while etic knowledge is essential for cross-cultural comparison (Lett, 2006). I, as researcher, need to distinguish between participants’ responses and what I derive from the situation as an observer. For Lett (2006:3) ‘defining emics and etics in epistemological terms provides a reliable means of making that distinction’. Thus, I use an emic perspective to focus on intrinsic issues that are meaningful to participants who are judges of validity and an etic perspective to focus on extrinsic concepts and categories that have meaning for me as observer where I am the judge.

From narrative to themes and discourses

Each research text is a site of cultural/social value systems that have enacted, negotiated, and experienced transformation via interpretive repertoires. I have created a rhythm in the presentation that the reader can follow easily and become familiar with quite quickly. This uses section headings (themes) within which there are distinct findings, examples of distinction (discourses), and commentary on these. In this thesis, a discourse is understood as something that is talked about, how subjects are constructed in the texts that are sites of struggle or conflict resolution. For example in most professional peoples’ texts there is likely to be a number of discourses of power and of knowledge. A typical example of conflict would be a market economic discourse of health care practice as opposed to a caring, moral and ethical discourse. Both of these could be used to define what a particular health care professional is or to show a paradox if the two discourses are found in the research text of one person. In this chapter, further examples are used and commented on and the transition is made between text and themes until the closing of the theme. I start and proceed in a logical way and the presentation thus reflects the order in which I conducted the interview. Therefore theme nine is no less (or more) important than theme one, but each theme has key discourses within it. I patterned the presentation in a way similar to swinging on a vine (after Chenail, 1995) i.e. I take quotes one at a time from each text and then select the most appropriate for the theme, linking them with comments to help the reader navigate the text.

In order to present these findings I have tried to use simplicity so as not to drown myself or the reader in the vast sea of data generated in the research texts. Thus, I try to move from the simple to the complex using examples to build within each theme. While Chapter seven will weave in points from the literature in order to create a discussion as if in a pub or restaurant or any other social setting, this chapter undertakes to simply allow the reader to peer in through the window to see and hear what the people or players are saying and to an extent, doing. To this end, the interviews were deliberately started in an open fashion. This follows the logic that the whole of the interview process would be an open affair and only semi structured in the sense of my own subjective control of the process as discussed in the previous chapter. I, as researcher, actively sought and found voices of participants in a particular place or setting (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

What the themes represent

Some nine themes from interpreted meanings emerged through the employment of dialectical tracking i.e. discursive thematic interpretation from the texts that involve, among other things, salient conflicts, paradoxes, and strategies of resolution. From my perspective, insights were sought as to what the participants saw and what they expressed in narrative. For example, there may be the belief that SMEs have to have relationships with others as part of how marketing is practiced. This may be ‘read’ by members of a specific context or community. I was looking for beliefs and meanings and therefore what metaphors, metonyms or concepts are used to describe behaviours and how participants use context meanings to subvert dominant or orthodox meanings and values in terms of wider society. Thus, expressions that emphasise, for example, practicality, industriousness, or conservatism are evident and tied in with aspects of everyday life and the social dynamics that drive it. Hence anti or pro marketing narrative or pro or anti training narrative raises discourses or allows them to emerge, such as the socially constructed necessity of having training or paradoxically that of training being a waste of time (unless useful for a secondary purpose such as doing it to obtain a grant). The narrative might glamorise or trivialise, display a critical stance toward some issue, or have familial influence. My task is then, as far as I can within the limitations of this research, to take the themes that emerge and then adapt, combine, or transform to arrive at shared themes that fit the participants' circumstances. Depending upon what they want or are prepared to divulge this might include their social setting, their sense of history, beliefs, interests, aspirations or goals and make interpretations that localise social distinctions, boundaries, archetypes, folk theories of managing or of motivation or for managing interpersonal dynamics within broader social dynamics.

Such contestable qualities that champion or indeed problematise marketing lead to the themes laid out in this chapter of the thesis. It is recognised however, that this thesis is but a snapshot in time and such qualities and hence themes will mutate and continually renew, be defended, be resisted, recreated, modified, challenged, or altered in some way. There is therefore an ongoing social dialogue with social consequences. This includes myriad phenomena such as 'folk theories' of how best to promote products and the business and of possibilities of developing brands. There are many other non-marketing topics such as self worth, the pursuit of freedom and individuality, the dynamics of social relationships, gender roles and sexuality, taste and decency standards in relation to values and beliefs, or notions of equality in the workplace and wider society. The tensions and paradoxes that result from the participants as individuals and as members of this particular social arena and indeed wider society give rise to individual autonomy and conformity sensitivities. Participants therefore use countervailing meanings of SME marketing and business discourse to address a series of tensions and paradoxes between themselves and sources of social pressure or prescription in their working and everyday lives. At the centre of this is a range of conformity pressures and expectations.

Three observations on kinds of narrative that allow themes and discourses emerge

1. The participants' interpretation of marketing phenomena and the way they use countervailing discourses to create personalised meanings.
2. Participants in creative and provocative ways use marketing discourses. This does not produce a singular hegemonic outlook. Rather, there any number of

re-workings of dominant meanings and inter textual issues that are juxtaposed by the participants who come from a wide array of cultural viewpoints despite being identified and classified as either BtoB SME people or educators/trainers/developers with experience of such people. Thus, the participants construct interpretations of marketing phenomena that go with and against the grain of the ideological influences attributed to modernist and other marketing orientations.

3. The participants actively combine and adapt (or otherwise) marketing discourse to fit the conditions of their everyday and SME working lives.
4. The interpretive use of such discourses create emergent meanings that are reflective of interests, goals, experiences, and a multitude of other influences that determine social distinctions, spheres, boundaries, and relationships. Thus, the research texts produced in this thesis contain narratives that voice transformations and contested conventions and categories, which allow themes and discourses within the themes to emerge.
5. ETD participants in this study have a somewhat different view of the world to that of the SME participants and these fundamental but important differences become clear from the themes and discourses detailed below.
6. It should be noted that some of the ETD participants had, as part of their history, the experience of running their own small business and in one case in particular, a number of sizable SMEs. Indeed quite a few are involved in running small businesses as well as fulfilling their role within the organisation that employs them and are encouraged to do so by their organisation. Similarly, a few of the SME participants had been or still are advisers to other smaller businesses, reflecting the somewhat complex nature of the SME scene or community in the North East of England and potentially further afield.

In addition, the reader should note that the analysis of the texts utilises some of the basic tools of Discourse Analysis as suggested in the previous chapter. Thus, the texts are analysed and scrutinised using devices such as pauses or gaps that are deemed significant or where emphases are made on words as represented in the text such as ***PLEASE*** representing the loudness of the word. A full word or words might be stretched for emphasis such as ***e x t r a o r d i n a r y***. Inhalation or sighs or emphasis on part of a word might also lend significance to understanding meaning in the texts.

Themes emerging from the research texts and discourses chosen to support each theme

The nine themes emerging from the research texts are interpreted as outlined below and are followed by the chosen discourses that support each theme:

Theme 1 – SME Marketing is an Acceptable Notion

Discourse 1a – The acceptance of some kind of marketing reality

Discourse 1b – The Jackdaw University

Discourse 1c –The self in relation to SME marketing practice

Theme 2 – Marketing is Much More Than the 4Ps

Discourse 2a – David and Goliath

Discourse 2b - Foreground and background

Discourse 2c – Tradition I: Taking goods to market

Discourse 2d – Tradition II: Science stuff and fluffy stuff

Discourse 2e – Tradition III: The apparent anti-science of plonking the paradigm

Discourse 2f – Tradition IV: Communication, identity and branding but no 4Ps

Discourse 2g – Opportunity - The small ship and the super tanker

Discourse 2h – The absurdity and the usefulness of more and more Ps

Discourse 2i – The perceived unwillingness to research the market

Discourse 2j – Piggybacking and speed dating

Theme 3 – SME Marketing ETD Has Three Stakeholders With Differing Needs

Discourse 3a – Anti-academia and pro-skills of the SME

Discourse 3b - Training to network and networking through development events

Discourse 3c – Experiential learning of theory through practice and simplicity for clarity

Discourse 3d - The training provider

Discourse 3e – Training needs analysis

Theme 4 – Basic Functional and Technical Skills Are Not Enough

Discourse 4a – Being able to think is critical but this is not necessarily critical thinking

Discourse 4b – Experiential learning is key to skills training success

Discourse 4c– Skills are important but can be bought

Theme 5 – SME Marketing Curriculum Needs 'Horses For Courses'

Discourse 5a – Supporting the business by understanding culture and ethics and things other than the basics

Discourse 5b – Keeping is basic and simple

Discourse 5c – Changing relationships

Discourse 5d – Creativity and innovation in delivery

Discourse 5e – Necessary evil enforcement and enlightenment

Theme Discourse 6 – SME Marketing is Infused With Relational Perspectives

Discourses 6a – Relationships are crucial

Discourses 6b – Relationships are obvious and inevitable

Discourse 6c – Relationships and cobbler's shoes again

Discourses 6d – Relationships are risk reducers

Theme 7 – Marketing is About People Not a Science, Art, or Post-Modern Debate

Discourse 7a – Marketing is networking

Discourse 7b – Marketing is about big business

Discourse 7c – Marketing is about people not robots – and a Babel Fish

Discourse 7d - Marketing is about leadership

Theme 8 – There Are Many Interpretations of ETD in SME-Land

Discourse 8a – Enterprise and development training is for us

Discourse 8b – Enterprise and development training is not for us

Discourse 8c – Management is organic and democratic and you need this in development

Discourse 8d – You have to keep SME people 'at it', so offer them more than mere ETD

Discourse 8e – Easiest, cheapest, quickest or it has to be practical and experiential

Theme 9 – ETD Can Be Delivered But There are Many Ways to Deliver Which Constantly Change

Discourse 9a – Learning something as a team that fits in with the business

Discourse 9 b – Nothing fits our business

Discourse 9c– Learning is experiential

Discourse 9d– What ever it is there has to be a measurable result

Discourse 9e – Learning is best when it's social

Theme 1 – SME Marketing is an Acceptable Notion

Before the interview proper, a general preamble as to the nature of the study and the differences between the terms mainstream, organisational, industrial and business-to-business (BtoB) marketing was first aired. Theme 1 is therefore derived from the preamble to the interview and what precedes that in terms of telephone calls and emails in order to set up the interview. The participant was then told that the study was also concerned with education, training and development (ETD) but particularly training and what the content of textbooks, journals, or training packages might have to offer. All of the participants appeared happy with this.

They were therefore told that one of the things I wanted to do was to explore their views on what has been happening in marketing. As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that participants' worldviews went beyond the tighter, more specific context I had originally suggested and their broader experiences would inevitably colour their view within a tighter context. So participants were told that the research and the thesis was all about business and marketing planning, products, customers, competition, suppliers, key customers, important suppliers, finding customers – the traditional things associated with marketing. But they were also told that it is was about relationships, networking, employee relations, and other relevant issues in their world view of marketing, which would allow them to bring in any broader views into the arena. However, as a reminder they were told that the focus of the study was, in short, about running a relatively small enterprise and about issues that matter, which might be seen as internal or external to the organisation, as well as being about management and marketing. They were further reminded that the study was also about education, training and development.

As a result of the responses I received, my original impression that I brought to this study, that the usual language associated with marketing was absent from talk of various kinds (for example business presentations), was largely altered. This had been based on some observations of SME people and entrepreneurs in action. Now I was testing this out and participants appeared to agree with my commentary as I spoke and if not remained politely silent. They appeared to be ‘fine’ or ‘okay’ with the explanation and appeared to align themselves with marketing as a notion of reality as there was no resistance to this or attempts to subvert it.

Participants were told they could rest assured that the research was being conducted in the strictest of confidence and that they would remain anonymous in the thesis. In addition to Northumbria University’s code of ethics in research, participants were informed that I am a member of the Market Research Society (MRS), which has a long-established code of practice, and that I am also a member of other professional bodies that have high conduct expectations.

Participants were then asked if there was anything else that I could tell them or anything they would like to comment on before we began the interview. There was very little to add from across the interviews as most were ‘fine’ with it. The preamble varied from interview to interview but by and large was similar each time.

Theme 1 Supporting Discourses

Within Discourse 1, there is a simple expression of an acceptance of a notion of some sort of marketing made by all participants and two other notions that can be discerned from the texts of two of the SME principals. The first of these is an expression of the desire to collect things that may be of use to the participant personally or to the business. The second is an affirmation of the individual principal necessarily being surrounded by a marketing reality or realities of one sort or another, where marketing is socio-culturally constructed.

Discourse 1a – The acceptance of some kind of marketing reality

That some kind of marketing reality or realities exist for participants is not in question. None of the participants appeared to have problems with the term 'marketing' or the ideas presented in the preamble. The corollary to this, I have interpreted as an acceptance of a thing called marketing, or a marketing reality (or realities) in the participant's worldview. Otherwise, I assume that one or more of them would have objected, not understood and said so, or made some other comment but there was none of this in evidence.

Gordon, an SME principal simply responded to my preamble with this initial response:

> **PC**
> *'(Preamble)…'*
>
> **Gordon**
> *'No, that's fine'.*

The two exceptions are **Ann** and **Charlotte**, both SME principals. That is not to say they were not accepting of, or comfortable with the idea of some form of SME marketing - they were. They simply added, unprompted, a little extra as explained by the second and third discourses presented below.

Discourse 1b - The Jackdaw University

Rather like the jackdaw's shiny objects of desire, **Ann's** interpretation as to what the research is about expresses meaning beyond the act of partaking in the study. Despite being told that this is an academic piece, leading to my own PhD, Ann immediately saw potential in the results of the study. Jackdaws are notorious for collecting things and Ann is apparently a collector of things that might help her or her company. I found out later in the interview that Ann had a problem with paper qualifications, as she sees them, such as undergraduate degrees. This is linked to her recruitment experience and her disappointment with undergraduate students either in employment or on placement who seem to know or be able to do little. This does not deter Ann from finding potential value in what is ostensibly an academic document i.e. an academic thesis:

> **Ann**
> *'No, all of that sounds fine. I think that just about covers what I had understood the purpose of the meeting to be'.*
>
> **PC**
> *'Okay…er…(interrupted)'*
>
> **Ann**
> *'Would it possible to get a copy of the research when it's finished?'*

I suggested the possibility of a readable kind of report that everyone could have that is not an academic thesis that would be rather burdensome to read. Ann was visibly very interested and stated, '*That sounds really interesting yeah'.* Ann was from the start very alert and attentive and gave me the impression she was looking to get something out of the time invested in granting and taking part in the interview. As the interview proceeded this became more obvious and linked to her eagerness to acquire knowledge of any sort.

I interpret this to be an expression made by Ann in particular but by some of the other participants, not of a flippant 'University of Life'-type perspective but one of opportunistic knowledge seekers in their quest to run their businesses or do their jobs (since this was expressed by some of both SME principals and ETD people). Ann, I believe, would have said the same if my research had been about finance or any other subject-based research. Most of the participants, as it turns out, were interested in some form of report on the findings.

Discourse 1c – The self in relation to SME marketing practice

Charlotte went beyond the mere acceptance of my description that involved SME marketing practice. I would find out later that before this latest incarnation Charlotte had had her own marketing communications company and before that had been involved in PR and had been a journalist. Without prompting, Charlotte was eager to tell me this. I would find out later that Charlotte was very keen on experience and experiential learning. This is also linked to the relationship and tension between theory and practice. I explained in the preamble what I was doing, adding that my original, finely focussed context, appeared now to be influenced by broader views of marketing in society and more generally as well as the SME or small firm experience.

It was clear to me as Charlotte began to put herself, her experience, and her company right into the frame from the start. Charlotte was the only participant to do this and she did so with great confidence, assertiveness and immediacy, In her response Charlotte places emphasis on the word ***YEAR*** when mentioning turnover and this I interpreted as the opposite of defeatist, Charlotte being a very optimistic, determined and driven person). I knew exactly where I stood and knew that this interview would be particularly informative and challenging, which it proved to be in spades. Her personal identity of autonomy and independence, of self-esteem, of confidence and in essence a sense of 'this is who I am' stood out. This, for all of us, is of course constantly defined and redefined in terms of others and therefore social relations are a function of one's place in society, of transient social encounters, and the boundaries of self-identity. Other participants would, later on in their respective interviews, assert the idea of self in relation to others. For example **Gordon**, a sales director vis-à-vis his MD and his own underlings or **Ann**, a partner in her business and relations with staff both seek autonomy and independence. In terms of confidence and characteristics of SME owner-managers, other SME principals displayed either recurring self-doubt or confidence that stems from familiarity, recognition and acceptance of their role. This is found much less in the ETD participants but can be detected in those who are also running (or have run) a small business.

Theme 2 – Marketing is Much More Than the 4Ps

Neither the ETD participants nor the SME principals are adherents to a strictly 4P approach to marketing with expressions of a much more relational approach to marketing for SMEs. Some went a little further towards what I call a ‘critical understanding of reality’ as opposed to a 'marketing occurs in isolation’ direction.

The first area of ‘questioning’ asked the participants to reflect on the word marketing and what this meant to them. This was then followed by asking them to reflect on their understanding of marketing techniques followed by suggestions around the importance often attached to the 4P model as well as segmentation analysis and other modernist conceptions that are considered by adherents of orthodox marketing in the last three or four decades at least to be transferable to any context. This theme is therefore about the nature of marketing, especially for product-based SMEs but the participants were asked in an open fashion so that a more general reflection was possible. Some immediately responded and sought clarity as to the context in which the questions and suggestions were being placed.

Theme 2 Supporting Discourses

There were a good number of ideas and notions expressed that can be seen as discourses within this theme. This is not surprising since it deals with many aspects at the heart of what marketing might mean and be to the participants. As I had hoped, the differences between what might happen in marketing terms in large companies as opposed to smaller ones emerged immediately along with a clear indication that the 4Ps and other modernist concepts would not be the only game in town.

Discourse 2a – David and Goliath

Very early in the interview **Gordon,** an SME principal in sales appeared to want to put me in the picture in a calm but authoritative way as to what is the heart of the matter i.e. a sort of David and Goliath battleground. From the outset the dominance, not of the expected big company competition, but of suppliers came to the fore:

> *‘‘There are two sort of main suppliers that we have. One is Kyocera Mita and the other one is Panasonic. Both marketing managers for the two companies are guilty of the same thing … that is they tell you about the product…… but they don’t tell you everything about it. They give you the marketplace for it …*

> *or what they think is the marketplace… which……which……which in the majority of cases isn't right … '*

As this interview progressed, it was this 'small company up against much bigger players' that would dominate and recur in different guises.

Discourse 2b - Foreground and background

Gordon then talked in terms of product, place, and so on but this was clearly not the central issue. Nor for Gordon was 'The Marketing Concept'. Gordon was aware of this terminology and what it means within marketing orthodoxy from training courses and seminars that he has attended but again for Gordon this concept is in the background and in the foreground is his own 'marketing concept' and

> '*…what people are doing are using the 4ps and adapting their own ideas … and at the end of the day they are not using the 4ps if that makes sense to you … they touch on it but don't necessarily home in on it'.*

In contrast to Gordon, **Naomi**, part of a partnership, had no idea what the 4Ps-type jargon means until it was explained. Naomi saw marketing as being very important to the business. She also saw the need in getting people to buy into what it is all about. Naomi learned about marketing from society, from what happens around her and appeared to pick up ideas rather like a pop artist would pick up the litter of society's cultural artefacts and produce 'art', Andy Warhol style. Naomi's reference points are Levi's, Ray-Ban's and sales promotions which happen in pubs: Naomi had concerns about the power of advertising, especially TV advertising, over the individual and seemed to want to learn from it but paradoxically also wanted to switch it off. Throughout the interview Naomi returned to a tension between a kind of social responsibility and what marketing, and in particular promotions, can do for her and her business which for her was definitely in the foreground. However, it is clear to me that it is not some sort of 4P model that is in Naomi's mind, although superficially it could be interpreted as such. I then have to probe for an input on marketing techniques. For Naomi

> '*it's how you come over isn't it? …emm…selling your idea and knowing your product………. It's selling to a market isn't it? It's finding the words….*

> *Marketing is …there's a market out there…tapping into it in the right way or…finding out who you want to target and making the right approach to target them.*

There are few pauses or stress on words if any. I refer to earlier comments on the influence of advertising and Naomi's interest in the subliminal aspects of it. I then mention one of my students and his dissertation on subliminal product placement, Tom Cruise and Ray-Bans. I mention my fake Ray-Bans and Naomi pulls a pair of sunglasses out of a bag and declares these'fake' also. I mention product placement and its origins in soap operas but Naomi's thoughts moved to a Levi campaign and how Levi's marketing campaigns have always been successful. The exchange continues around everyday objects that are cultural artefacts such as jeans and music. This seems to me to be somewhat of a postmodern outlook from Naomi, at least in her personal if not her business life and I remember thinking that it will be interesting to see if the two are separate or if they intertwine. I later discover that indeed they intertwine.

Discourse 2c – Tradition I: Taking goods to market

It is clear that the ETD participants in the first instance at least see marketing in terms of orthodoxy where the seeking and fulfilling of needs comes straight into consciousness. This can be seen directly in a number of narratives, for example that of **Sid** as well as with **Dave,** who is both traditional and relational. **Charlotte**, an SME principal but also a business adviser in her own right, later talks of the 'science of marketing'. However, she appears at first to be on the same tack as Sid but as the interviews progress the two apparently take different courses. Sid is now an ETD participant but very experienced in the running of substantial SMEs and with big company experience. Sid is very careful with his words. He has a background in '*business to business, manufacturing, er, engineering products. Engineered products'* and marketing has always been close by to the areas of operations and production in which Sid has worked. Sid is a traditionalist in marketing terms:

> *'………it starts with the marketing, the marketeers, and then bringing information from the outside world and, and sort of working with the engineers and the manufacturers to produce goods **THAT** really do fulfil the requirements of the customer'.*

Sid's experience has been with products that other businesses incorporate in their own products. Notice the emphasis on ***THAT***. Sid is not a trained marketer (and he frequently uses the word 'marketeer' for marketer) yet his expression might well be straight out of early Marketing Management texts by the likes of Philip Kotler.

Charlotte expresses similar sentiments in terms of getting the product, message or service out there but is much more forthright and less hesitant than Sid is almost strident:

> *'Yeahhh, that's interesting actually cos …dictionary definition or…how I see it is …I think it's two things it's 1. emmm… researching for holes …and then you know looking for products to fill them emm but its also about much more than that it's you know public relations I guess emm…changing people's perceptions or **PERCEPTIONS** and changing them, it's about positioning, it's about relationship management, it's about all it's……in my sense **OUTWARD** I think outward-facing stuff from a company. It's about…you know …how you get a message, a product or a service into the marketplace'.*

Charlotte's 'searching for holes' is classic orthodox marketing, as is the emphasis on outward and again could be straight out of early Kotler. So too could *'changing people's perceptions'* (note the emphasis on ***PERCEPTIONS***) be seen as virtually the same as orthodoxy's 'identifying, anticipating and satisfying need'-type definition. The emphasis on ***OUTWARD*** highlights the straightforward 'get it out there and sell it otherwise there is no point'. Later in the interview, Charlotte majors on networking and relationships, something she puts a simple, if subdued marker down for here, linking relationship management to that ***OUTWARD*** orientation.

Discourse 2d – Tradition II: Science stuff and fluffy stuff

Charlotte appears to carry on with an orthodox approach and, unprompted apart from the words marketing and techniques, brings in the notion of marketing as a science - the 'hard' stuff as opposed to the softer side of things, that in Charlotte's response seem to happily co-exist. For Charlotte:

> *'Yeah, yeah that…I guess then that that's it's…it's what I call very much the left brain stuff which is **theeee** statistical analysis of research, emm…not worth doing something unless you manage and measure it…emm…all of that*

> *really quite…I find very hard…people don't think that this, this is marketing but it's, it's a science it's not just the whole fluffy stuff that people I think will generally associate with marketing which is the …the softer bit of the marketing mix which are relationships and press and PR…emm…networking and…all …the whole sort of…branding …the whole sort of comms thing'.*

Charlotte is as brisk and assertive as ever and stretches the **theeee** to highlight the importance she attaches to the hard side of marketing as she understands it and is clearly a believer in measuring things despite a lot of her experience being on the 'fluffy' side as she describes it. Again though Charlotte goes beyond the marketing mix and throws in networking, relationships and branding.

Discourse 2e – Tradition III: The apparent anti-science of plonking the paradigm

The transference comments I built into the probing had a resonance with the ETD participants. They knew what I was getting at immediately but it is here that a clear difference emerges between the SME principals and the ETD participants. One of the latter is **Dave**. Dave, like **Charles**, sees the 4Ps as a useful starting point, something to 'hang-their-hat-on type of framework' and **Geoff** (a training slip road) sees this in a rather similar fashion, but **Charlotte** is different in terms of being an SME principal first and foremost. However, they all get the transference idea. For Dave the 4Ps type framework is a useful training device '*to sort of hang their hat on some framework…*' and Dave believes that if they are innovative with it, it will give '*them some competitive advantage'.*

Charlotte appears to contradict herself. While raising the issue of plonking this set of concepts seemingly on to anything that moves, I did not use this terminology at first but Charlotte did. In this regard, Charlotte contradicts herself. She recognises the problem in terms of her own business. Her frustration can be seen in the expressive ***MOVE*****:**

> *'trying to …**MOVE** …there's little that you know so you just plonk it on to …emm…existing structures…it's one of the reasons why this company struggles actually, not needing…we are **NOT…**we haven't invested in marketing really, and we, we haven't been rigorous really about its application as a science'.*

For Charlotte the absence of strategic marketing is the problem.

> *'…I think the other thing people do and I know that I'm guilty of it is that you, instead of taking a strategic view, and actually that is what this is meant to be about, you* ***DON'T,*** *you take a operational or short term view. You try to* ***JAM IT*** *into need rather than actually trying to get the whole picture'.*

The emphasis on ***DON'T*** and ***JAM IT*** (a reference to square pegs in round holes) seems to indicate some sort of frustration on Charlotte's part of the recognition of the problem but being unable to solve it or at least tackle it.

Discourse 2f – Tradition IV: Communication, identity and branding but no 4Ps

For **Ann** (an SME principal) it appears at first that marketing is at the core of the business. This is not in terms of the all-encompassing modernist marketing 4Ps and the rest, but in terms of first impression that is about identity. This is very close to **Beth**, another SME principal. These two businesses share characteristics such as present size but are very different kinds of businesses and very different in other ways, such as scope of ambition. Yet these two participants responded in very similar ways. **Heather** is one of the ETD people who has her own business also. Heather is very close to Ann in relation to how, in principle, marketing is seen and very close to Beth on her attitude toward the 4Ps approach to marketing. **Peggy** is an ETD participant but runs her own business and is strident in her advocation of marketing meaning sales and communication.

Ann feels that '*marketing is at the core …****.at…. the… core…*** *of the business in a very fundamental way'*. Ann needs to get marketing right in order to have a business at all.

> '*if we can't actually source products effectively and then move them on effectively, build a reputation, and the business wouldn't be sustainable ………..* ***WE*** *try to be as ethical as we possibly can be…This is important in terms of the image that the company presents of itself. We want to be seen as responsible, trustworthy…em… and safe'.*

This is more than a 'meeting need' attitude to marketing. Communication is important but so is Ann's people (note the ***WE***). It is clear that ethics come into it and this includes an eye on suppliers. Ann is dismissive of the 4Ps model, the Marketing Concept, and other such models and she recognises them but has no *'academic sort of grounding in them'.* She noted that in the early days, *'when you're business planning and things like that the terms do crop up'.* Ann appears to tolerate this sort of thing, possibly to get something else, like money for the business. Ann has a well thought out approach to communications that goes beyond the reductionist models and concepts.

Beth has formed a new company and, like Ann, is conscious of the identity of it seeing marketing in a communications way as well. However, promotion might better describe Beth's outlook and it is in this that Beth and Ann differ. Both could have been cited in the foreground/background discourse since both recognise the 4Ps jargon and approaches but appear to have no use for any of it. There is a much simpler attitude toward communications and Beth, unlike Ann, does not use the word and Beth's language is much more tactical, as in the use of the words *'advertising' or 'promotion'.* The terms marketing and marketing techniques appear to mean the same thing to Beth and are fused into one continuum in terms of the basics like advertising but also

> '*networking and going into emm…other areas whether it be …exhibitions, trips away to…invites from suppliers…emm……obviously looking at the sort of products that you have on sale, because that might not …you know you have an idea what you've actually got within your showroom might not necessarily be hitting the correct market but obviously having information and on looking at the sales figures and such like to see what your turnover is on a particular product, whether it's worthwhile keeping them on show or changing it to try to tap into a different market'.*

I reiterated the idea of the 4Ps but Beth was confused. I explained and Beth kept it simple by stating, '*I'd say it would be something that we would maybe put into place without realising that we'd done it'.* I suggested that it would not be part of Beth's language and Beth replied, '*No. We wouldn't talk about 4Ps'.*

At some point Beth and her business partner may have to engage with this (for business plans for the bank perhaps) but now this is all very much in the background and dealing with customers and networking are in the foreground. When pressed on the transference (from big business to small, and to other contexts) idea **Heather**, an ETD participant, was rather thoughtful in her response and had clearly considered some of the micro businesses or 'one-man-band-sole traders' that she works with as a business coach. She had a clear idea of the differences between these people and more substantial SMEs. Heather felt that resources are an issue and that '*Sole traders would never know what the 4Ps would be'*.

Peggy saw sales and communication as marketing. However, Peggy was firmly in orthodoxy mode when she expands on this by explaining,

> '*Marketing to me personally is all about theory, frameworks, systems and the* ***u n d e r p i n i n g*** *…emm…a systematic way …emm…to go out there and, and then the practitioner skills that lie on top of that I would put under sales and communication………. I feel strongly that, that emm, sales and communications are stand-alone subjects and emm although they come under the broader heading of marketing emm, they shouldn't be confused (I agree with a right) as part of marketing theory (I agree with* a right).'

Peggy is aware and an advocate of the orthodox APIC-type planning models (as stressed in her use of the word ***u n d e r p i n n i n g***) which she uses in her role as an ETD person. Interestingly, as will be seen later, Peggy is involved in a kind of postmodern business, but that does not necessarily lead to postmodern marketing.

Discourse 2g – Opportunity - The small ship and the super tanker

Sid, the ex-SME principal turned ETD-type of adviser, combines a modernist, orthodox marketing outlook with an opportunity orientation. Sid sees the possibility of seizing the opportunity through the advantages of being small with the classic characteristics of flexibility and speed. However, Sid moves towards a more relational approach where after a time, in his words '*about five years'* you get accepted. He continued, '*… you know relationships develop much quicker……em… and I think really that's really the start of business'*. Sid saw the importance of reputation, built up over time. Sid had been very hesitant in this response, as evidenced from the 'errrs' and 'emms' as well as the triple use of words like '*would, would, would*'. So I asked Sid directly, without leading, did he mean reputation? Sid's response lost the hesitation and was direct and he differentiated between different types of reputation:

> *'Yes. I think its reputation. Reputation in a number of senses you know because you build a reputation. Your product will have a reputation you know for stuff like, you know, quality. Quality, very much is quality, performance, reliability. All of these things are in the eye of the customer. So that's one sort of reputation. The other sort of reputation, I think is, um, is the organisation itself and it's. I don't know whether culture's the right word but the fact that you've sort of, you've been born and you've survived and now you have this sort of ongoing platform'.*

Sid saw this as a form of assurance that can lead to a partnership rather than just transactions '*………reputational things that go beyond just your, we've got a nice product………or we've got a variety of products that will, sort of, assist the customer to develop what they want to do'.*

With this I concluded that Sid might be rather traditional in terms of marketing but in the broadest sense that he was also very much a relationship marketing and management person and would advocate this in business or as an adviser. It is the flexibility and manoeuvrability of the small firm for Sid that is key to seizing the moment. It was also the realisation that you have to actually sell something to survive and succeed and not some sort of adherence to a 4P philosophy. Sid emphasised being '*more **AWARE'*** for survival and that being at the '*forefront of knowledge about marketing, is their strength'*. Sid went on to extol the virtues of employing a marketing consultant to aid non-marketers i.e. buying expertise in. I questioned Sid about his confidence on the technical and operational side but his apparent lack of it on the marketing side. This is where Sid's opportunism is evidenced with regard to being an SME and the advantage of smallness where he stated that '*we could sort of, react to sort of discourse with the customer and give them things more…more quickly'*. This is where Sid uses smallness whereby '*we could manoeuvre our small ship much more deftly…………than a big, sort of, super tanker-type…'*

Discourse 2h – The absurdity and the usefulness of more and more Ps

Academics, as discussed in the literature review, have thought to extend the 4Ps as a way of covering more eventualities. The 4P approach is supported by most of the ETD people while the SME principals do not value it in the same way. For the latter, the 4Ps and other phenomena merely exist and adding to the list of Ps will therefore

have no impact. The ETD participants see this approach as useful for training. **Geoff** is typical of the ETD participants who on the one hand send up the 4Ps, or the number of Ps but on the other sees the approach in a '*training slip road*' kind of way (similar to **Dave's** framework to hang things on as mentioned earlier).
For Geoff:

> *'I've always struggled, personally, to separate marketing from selling…4 Ps isn't it… I think I've seen up to 10. I struggled to remember 4 so 10 was never an option for me (laughter)'.*

I pressed Geoff a little on marketing techniques and Geoff turned it back to an image thing that might fit in with the communication discourse above. Geoff sees the usual orthodox things, only on tighter budgets. I took it back to the Ps business and pressed Geoff on this and the transference to different contexts idea and Geoff stated, *'It's largely a gimmick and yes people have jumped on it to write books'*. Geoff clearly sees the Ps extension as absurd or at the very least gimmicky, but he either did not really get the transference point or he firmly believes the Ps approach can be used to lead to other meaningful things in the SME context - especially the difference between marketing and selling. To Geoff this is important as evidenced in the following passage:

> *'the 4Ps let you talk, particularly about the product. Well, you know, what is your product? Why is it attractive to people? Why are they going to want it? What's the quality of your product like? Em, and what's the image of the product like? Gearing them to talk about the pricing, how does the price compare in the market against other, similar products? Em, …does the price that you're able to command actually enable you to make a profit? Or are you going to have to cut your price to the bone so much that it's not actually worth doing be cause you're not going to stay in business very long? So it's a bit of a focus……but it's really to lead into other things'.*

Peggy, as an ETD participant, is not far removed from Geoff who is also an advocate of sales results, but adds communications to the concept. When pressed on marketing techniques Peggy revealed her modernist credentials by going straight into an APIC-type mode but Peggy too saw the absurdity of the Ps focus. Peggy was clearly aware of the 4Ps, having completed a postgraduate diploma in marketing some time ago, and willingly discussed the Ps extension in an amused kind of way:

> *'If you said to me 'sales or selling techniques', that's a totally different pot of tea. That involves skills and competencies …and practitioner skills………5Ps when I did my CIM 20 years ago. I actually discovered a client with something called 'Alastair Baxter's 9 Ps of marketing' some 4 years ago which gave me a heart attack. Em, I don't know how many Ps there are meant to be nowadays in the marketing mix (laughs), I find it quite amusing'.*

Peggy apparently seemed comfortable with the APIC approach and used the practice of probing around transference to restate this position:

> *'…I'll always sit down …not only with clients, with my staff and say 'right, let's do a swot analysis' and then **DO USE** the terminology…'.*

Peggy took me through the usual stages of a decision sequence management model adding

> '*And **THEN**, stage 3 will be how I will be… how I will put I suppose a stereotypical Ps mix, marketing mix together. So I won't do that until I've actually, I'll call that stage 3 in my…head…my logic'.*

Peggy underlined her belief in the APIC-type system by stressing that her and her team ***DO USE*** swot and stressed ***THEN***, an indication of her belief in decision sequence models.

Discourse 2i – The perceived unwillingness to research the market

Sean, an ETD participant, is critical of SMEs in terms of how they see marketing and not being able to distinguish between marketing and sales or marketing and marketing research as evidenced by his discourse below:

> *'……that's where SMEs get tied up sometimes. That they view marketing as basically just a different word for sales…… so looking for market research, establishing what the market is, is there a market……then establishing what the market is and then doing marketing and hitting the right targets……'.*

Sean perceived '*not cold calling but generating a relationship with the people'* as the way to sell and stated:

> '*researching the market and applying the right marketing techniques, what ever they **MAY BE**…err…is something which the SMEs would benefit from. I don't think the SMEs are, as I'm not, fully aware of all of the, if you like, techniques that are available and how best to apply them'.*

Sean was unconvinced that SMEs research their markets but was convinced that better relationships would ensue if businesses got to know their market better and therefore they would be able to practice better marketing, '***MAY BE'.*** This emphasis underscored Sean's doubt that SMEs can or will do this due to a lack of interest or willingness to research the market but that instead they use networking and relationships to generate knowledge. For Sean:

> *'SMEs are very…sometimes very narrow in what they want to achieve and they want to go out and find this round peg to match a round hole and when they do get out there and find that there is square pegs and triangular pegs and what have you then they tend to grow that sort of knowledge and horizons a little bit – sometimes quite a lot actually ……….its like an education or development really…it's…it's, it's the really organic thing at times.'*

Discourse 2j – Piggybacking and speed dating

Jane, another of the ETD participants, appeared to be quite orthodox and traditional at first when asked about marketing but beneath this Jane was all about opportunity. Jane talked of segmentation, selling, and taking '*the product to the specific client needs'* through exploiting opportunities. Jane was hesitant. I pressed Jane a little further on marketing techniques and told her I did not want to lead her. Jane's response was all about relationships where:

> '*networking, em, attending business clubs and so on – that might be one technique of actually building relationships …things that come to **MIND** I suppose are more …more academic stuff like how you emm, differentiate the product, erm, in the market place. SMEs piggyback on larger companies' advertising, that sort of thing. But not much comes initially as to techniques…as marketing background…'.*

Jane hinted at a deeper approach to marketing being required. Jane sees that marketing is about orthodox need ('*academic things that come to **MIND'***) but for Jane marketing is also about relationships and still further '*about using what one can* *find*' or '*piggybacking'* as Jane would have it. I suggested that Jane's understanding of 'techniques' is twofold and she agreed since it is '*more about strategies that you would develop in order to em, increase your market share …'* and '*whether you might form collaborations with, em, complimentary products'.*

I asked about transference of traditional marketing models onto other contexts such as SMEs and Jane homed in on the kinds of techniques that are actually used to enhance the SMEs prospects with agencies like her own performing their function in practice. I said I thought '*this is like speed dating*' and Jane thought she agreed. Jane gave the example of '*a business-to-business em event called meet the buyer………….And then the other one is a project called STAR em, which stands for step ahead of the rest'.* These projects deliberately bring people and businesses together. Jane maintained that this is '*quite a* ***s e l e c t i v e*** *way of actually winning new clients and …… quite positive way of doing things…'.* However Jane still appeared to cling to her orthodox marketing belief but was paradoxically unsure *'…I think that's still necessary in terms of you know the general marketing thing em…I think that's still …* ***r e q u i r e d****,* ***BUT****, maybe that's a premise of larger companies, I'm, I'm not sure'.*

Jane showed some doubt about marketing orthodoxy for smaller businesses or SMEs and was suggesting that perhaps this really is, as evidenced by the protracted emphasis placed on **r e q u i r e d** and **BUT**. I agreed with her and so indicated this to her. More examples followed regarding the kind of thinking that existed for Jane in her job to promote the region and to help develop the small firms sector within it. Jane felt that SMEs could benefit from regional promotion because:

> *'off the back of that you know, small businesses can actually use that campaign to then say 'yes, look, this is, this is what, you know, the region's development agency say and we've got a, a great, sort of, bed and breakfast in Whitley Bay which is exactly what you're looking for'…whatever, you know, piggyback off that. I think that is more powerful than more businesses trying to em, compete with ads…….'*

Theme 3 – SME Marketing ETD Has Three Stakeholders With Differing Needs

In this theme issues around education, training and development emerge. I originally had thought, especially in the SME marketing context that I would be focussing on training. Training does feature and skills, which are focussed on more closely in the next theme, are important. However, to my surprise education and, possibly less surprisingly, development of individuals as well as the business featured strongly. It was suggested by me to participants that there are probably three stakeholders when considering education, training and development of anything but that I was of course interested in marketing in particular.

Theme 3 Supporting Discourses

A number of ideas and notions expressed by participants emerged as discourses within this theme. The SME and ETD groups of participants had very different views in the area of support for different stakeholders. Some differentiated between the individual and the business or company while others saw these as the same. There was some recognition that the person who delivers is a stakeholder too, as might be the agency/university/college as an organisation, but this was not strong with the SME participants.

Discourse 3a – Anti-academia and pro-skills

Ann is an SME principal who had a lot of passion to express in this area. Ann was the participant who requested a copy of the thesis, or at least the research findings as mentioned in theme 1 above. Ann, when asked what was needed for the various stakeholders in terms of ETD immediately sought clarification asking '*If I personally was on a training course……*' or '*staff training ability and anything like that?'.* I underlined that it was about Ann but also her staff and the business as a whole. Ann's experience of first degree qualified people was unfortunately, in her terms, not good. Ann suggested that they needed constant supervision immediately and that if they were to be trained then the business could only afford short bursts, which is typical of the small firm sector with limited resources. Ann felt there should be some sort of standard. '*They come along with a degree and it doesn't necessarily give me the quality assurance'*. They may present themselves well but '*in terms of actual skills I've found them a little bit wanting (laughs) to be honest'*. Such people cannot operate without '*a high level of supervision'*.

For existing staff a course would have to be targeted and short but not the usual two-day training course. Ann was concerned also about the quality of the trainers and stated that '*sometimes it's hard to know exactly what you're buying'*. Ann appeared to prefer skills first and foremost or at least the ability to do the job without high levels of supervision. This perhaps underscored the difference between small and larger companies. The latter may very well have the resources to allow staff to indulge in courses of study but in Ann's view, which may be common in the small firm world, was that this is not feasible and hence the need for people who can perform.

Beth, another of the SME principals with a similar sized business to Ann, on the surface could be thought to have a similar outlook to Ann but in my view the two are indeed similar and yet different. Beth was purely interested in dealing and coping with customers. Any skills required outside of the technical skills that exist around what the business is i.e. the design, construction, supply and fitting of kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms will be bought in as with, for example, IT. It would seem for Beth's business nothing on the marketing side would be needed unless bought in and the partners have deliberately limited the ambition of the business. Beth believed that the two partners have picked up the basic marketing knowledge they need from experience and from being on courses like the DMS. However, it is selling skills the business needs since, '*without selling you don't have a business'*. Beth would like to introduce technology for drawing plans for customers, which in her words, '*Is a good marketing tool rather than looking at a bird's eye view of a plan and obviously get a better idea of what the product is that they're purchasing'*, but this will be bought in.

I pressed a little further on development and what ETD might offer. Beth was not interested because she knew I am at NBS in Northumbria University and she did the

DMS there some years ago. Beth homed in on this to emphasise that the marketing stuff taught in NBS is all about big companies and not small businesses.

Discourse 3b - Training to network and networking through development events

An advocate of training in the marketing area is **Jack**, another of the SME principals. Jack was interested in all three of the suggested stakeholders and was certainly interested in training to develop – if the training has immediate relevancy. Training staff to know how to network (which would help the business) is one such scenario. Jack finds '*contacting the right persons in the organisation, getting your information to that person'* difficult and '*if someone in my organisation had knowledge of how to do that, the ability to do that, that would be invaluable'.*

Experience struck a chord with **Naomi**. I had met Naomi at a business club-type event with a guest speaker and an unusual but very effective format. Naomi was impressed with the format, though not the buffet or the facility, but never-the-less had felt it worthwhile in helping to network as well as get something from the event where, in her words, '*they're trying to sell themselves really, that's what you go to these events for'*. Naomi got things from other people like the '*guy who'd…been before…and to try and…things we're going through at the minute…moment…there was a lot of good stuff came out of that…'*

Naomi was still thinking about the event we had met at and whilst she thought that an evening course might suit her and her partner, her mind was still on the business club event and meeting business people in that way. For Naomi, '*what we need is probably acquired from people like that and …we did enjoy being there…'*

Discourse 3c – Experiential learning of theory through practice and simplicity for clarity

As ever, an unequivocal **Charlotte** saw beyond skills and training and expressed a 'bigger picture' worldview in a succinct manner. I asked what Charlotte thought the stakeholders would need and Charlotte went back to her idea of marketing being plonked in place '*regardless of whether people understand it or not'*. What is needed, in her opinion, is for people to '*educate themselves about the role of marketing and the marketing mix within their business function'*. Charlotte used the word science again as well as the word ***s p e c i a l i s m s*** in terms of people developing over time and developing their own language and hiding behind it. For Charlotte, in a changing world '*there are still certain things you should know'*. However, people get confused and that is '*why they need clarity …*' for understanding the environment. '*……it's about* ***s i m p l i f y i n g****...yes it's about clarity and why marketing's important……*'. *Whereas if it was more practical I think you'd get …a better* ***TAKE UP*** *and* ***BUY IN*** *and emm…you'd have a more satisfactory delivery I think'*.

Charlotte's emphasis is on both **s p e c i a l i s m s** and on **s i m p l i f y i n g**. Charlotte is an advocate of experiential learning. This does not deny theory (theory is okay as long as it is meaningful to practice, Charlotte and I had agreed) but does, in Charlotte's view, require simplicity in order to achieve clarity and requires practical outcomes to be successful, as emphasised by the words ***TAKE UP*** and ***BUY IN.***

Discourse 3d - The Training Provider

Despite his obvious experience of running SMEs, **Sid** appeared now to be in ETD mode and not surprisingly some of the other ETD participants, **Dave, Sean** and **Charles** had similar outlooks. All of these participants focus on training and the importance of the training provider in delivering this. Sid does distinguish between types of company, maintaining that some of the more technical or technology-based company principals are probably well-educated university types. Charles was in effect advocating a modernist approach to marketing and training courses with a good number of people from SMEs or some form of small firm coming together to be trained. This is different from Dave's more developmental approach of bringing people together. Dave was similarly disposed and immediately thought of training and delivery from a provider perspective where '*you can be sort of looking at one off, one day seminars on specific things'* such as advertising or '*a particular need for the whole organisation'*. For Dave, it appeared to be variable depending upon whether training was for the organisation or the individual. It could also be a number of diverse organisations coming together with '*fairly similar, common problems…so* *they can stimulate discussion and development amongst one another on a* ***DAILY*** *basis'.*

Dave emphasised the word ***DAILY*** and within this moved from training to the development of the individual. Dave's assumption is that to train and develop the individual would mean the business also develops.

Discourse 3e – Training needs analysis

Peggy is an advocate of training needs analysis. She agreed with me as to the number of stakeholders within my triangle as evidenced by her reply, '*Yep, yes that's, the majority of my job is dealing with three stakeholders'.* I asked what we should teach or give and Peggy talked of '*applied learning*'. Peggy, in her job, sees companies and conducts a '*full diagnostic of …fact finding needs analysis'.* In Peggy's experience, this can be quite bizarre when the company say they need one thing so that she has to find a way to redirect their focus to the real need, sometimes to literally save the company:

> *' So I'll go in and do a fact find with the company of exactly what it is that… that* ***COMPANY*** *needs are not the boss's wants but the company* ***needs*** *and that's looking at all staff, all systems, all literature, all communications blah di blah'.*

Once this is done then individual needs can be addressed, learning styles and methods can be assessed, and '*I will then, I will vary my message to, whether I'm talking to the company or the candidate depending on what their starting point is'.* However, she focuses on the company needs first. Like Dave, Peggy ***'OCCASIONALLY'*** puts on a collective, generic workshop for different businesses and in our discussion uses the example of solicitors who are '*dreadful at selling themselves as individuals and it's a presentation of themselves'.* I got the impression however that Peggy prefers '*bespoke training'* to meet '*bespoke company needs'.* Therefore, for Peggy, the emphasis is on the ***COMPANY*** and company ***needs***. ***OCCASIONALLY*** this can be done in a generic way so that more than one company can take part in training and this, if it is appropriate, can presumably be more cost effective for all concerned.

Jane went a little further with this idea. Jane appeared to be quite a traditional, orthodox marketing trainer and believed that basic marketing techniques are needed by start-ups. Jane perceived problems for people whose businesses have moved away from the start-up stage to growth when taking time out (even if this is only two or three days) because this does not tally with what they need and can accommodate. Jane seemed to be indicating that training courses are fine for start-up but something else is needed in terms of delivery beyond that. For **Geoff,** training has to be planned and it has to be real in the sense of addressing real issues that will help the business or the individual. **Heather** was simply interested in current issues and like **Ann** was aware of limited resources but translated this into the need to be innovative and interesting as well as current.

Theme 4 – Basic Functional and Technical Skills are Not Enough

In my research, I was interested to explore skills more in relation to marketing specifically and management more generally. This was not to suggest training was the only way to achieve success with skills – far from it. In this section of the interview I suggested that there is an argument for the provision and preparation of technical skills for SMEs in a number of areas of activity, marketing included. I suggested that the provision and preparation of technical skills misses the idea of the incorporation of critical reflection.

Theme 4 Supporting Discourses

In order to counter narrow vocationalism I stressed it was necessary that people are able to think beyond a point. I suggested that employees and employers would resist anything that they perceived theoretical, impractical or irrelevant and perhaps go for a served-up diet of things that can be immediately applied, regardless of depth of benefit. At the same time, concepts from psychology or sociology or applied fields are rejected for such reasons.

Discourse 4a – Being able to think is critical but this is not necessarily critical thinking

The participants had something to say about going beyond the basic skills a small firm might need. **Ann**, an SME principal had highlighted the need for employees to be aware, to be '***WIDE EYED***'. Ann is therefore not purely a skills advocate and recognised that:

'*there's loads of trendy terms around; blue sky thinking, thinking out the box…I guess what I would like from somebody coming to me fresh from university is somebody who is **WIDE EYED** and wide awake and able to think, to grab an concept to run it, to be excited to understand what I mean when I'm talking about…'.*

Jack was an SME principal who wanted more from his employees than mere mechanical performance and wanted people to be able to think for themselves. I alluded to a time when employers wanted people who they could mould into what they wanted, people who would fit in. Jack was the opposite of this and stated, '*I'd prefer thinking all day to be fair…… he needs to be able to analyse that and tell what he needs to do.* However, this is all to do with the business of business. I asked about sexual politics, ethics, and the like but Jack rejected this for the practical by stating, '….n*o, no I wouldn't think so at all… just come in and get on with it'.* Jack seemed highly pragmatic and could see the need for people to think beyond the immediate task in hand. I pressed further and mentioned finance and VAT but Jack stayed focussed on the functional and saw the need for considerations such as health and safety.

Sid is now an ETD advisor with considerable experience of running SMEs. Sid understood my questioning in the way I intended. He immediately said, '*Narrow and deep strategy as it were'.* I emphasised the dangers of developing only technical skills where participants '*would resist anything that would be too theoretical, too impractical, and too irrelevant ….'*

For Sid '*there is too much narrow…narrowness and depth of like individual expertise and this, this is part of the reason for subject areas, like marketing, being sort of diluted'.* Sid was adamant that '*broadening of the scope of subject area'* is the way and that '*people, people who start businesses probably the most successful ones are these broad minded people who truly can be deemed as entrepreneurs em…rather than the err more narrow minded techies'.*

I asked **Peggy** the same kind of question and her response was well beyond the basics. For Peggy '*it's no good just giving the technical knowledge ……knowledge and the technical skills if that person doesn't have the competency to then take them on board and apply that learning'.* Peggy believes in '*training needs analysis of each individual'.* Peggy emphasised that as an ETD adviser:

> '*you've **GOT** what **e v e r** their competency level, whatever their ability to apply that learning and one's gotta drill under… learning styles and communication preferred methods. Whatever …… there is a degree of technical and knowledge skills, technical transfer, knowledge **NEEDED**'.*

I pressed a little further on it being '*more than just knowledge transfer'* and Peggy replied that when she was doing the CIM diploma at '*Newcastle Poly……I argued, I argued at **e v e r y s i n g l e l e c t u r e** I went to'*. Because of her strong opinions and marketing background, this meant she felt she could give better examples than those that she was given. The emphasis on these words told much of what Peggy was about - challenging convention, which was also reflected in her recruitment activities and the need for real experience. Peggy felt that the marketing manager position needed more than '*theoretical knowledge'* because a raw graduate would '*drown within a month, they would, they would just back up and back up in reality*'.

Heather was aware of the *'almost automated'* approach to management because that is exactly what she appeared to be about. Her central role is one of being a business coach, as well as being a business adviser. **Heather** believes that '*everybody can move to their full potential, whatever that potential is'* and this helps them to work better '*within organisations'* by having '*reinforced skills'* if they are helped *'to be the people they can be'*. I wrongly suggested this to be a mentor but Heather rejected this by stating '*No, no mentors, mentors tell people what to do – a directive…'* Heather explained the difference by stating:

> *'Mentors say 'in my experience this is what we can do, I've seen this situation before, this is how we can handle it. I will take this work away from you now and I will do this and you will follow by my example'. **COACH** is non-directive, non-judgemental…we work with the individual…to help them go through change, whatever that change might be'.*

Heather used the example of someone working in a marketing job that is basic skills-based only. The coach's job is to '*work with them… to move to their own solutions and answers which is obviously much more powerful than being told what to do'.*

This is an interesting kind of empowerment in the work place in order to find solutions to problems and the development of the individual and by extension the business.

Discourse 4b – Experiential learning is key to skills training success

I asked what should education, training and development, either of people or the business, be about. **Ann** was particularly vocal in this area, but concise. With Ann the word ***IMAGINE*** is emphasised, said deliberately, loudly. Thinking critically is fundamental to what her company does anyway, so Ann was tuned in to this but believes in experiential learning as evidenced by her chosen words, '*and it's about being able to think, to question, to challenge and to **IMAGINE**'.*

Ann appeared to see this as the 'w*hat if*' world.*' And with that, we want to give 'what if' to children and to the companies that we sell to'.* I pushed her to distinguish between individual and business development and she did not think there is a distinction. Ann appeared to believe in '*team players, you need people with good interpersonal skills with an all round …em…ability to engage with people*.' This means customers or other team members and Ann asserted, '*We believe very strongly in a team base and everyone needs to contribute to that'.*

Charlotte was very responsive to a much more critical way of thinking. I talked in terms of narrow vocationalism and critical reflection. Charlotte understands this immediately as '*Thinking skills?'* I pressed a little further on critical reflection and thinking as well as our previous conversation about simply plonking things into positions that might not work. For Charlotte it was a question of '***BALANCE** in a team'* and explained that you need a, '*high degree of …skills, a highly experientially driven …emm…and a critical, critical effect in the leaders'.* Charlotte believes this is missing from many small companies so you need '*people who are not restricted to one thing'* but that '*there are some people who just want to do a job and they don't want to think…and what they just need is to have the skills to do the job. **FULL STOP**'*.

In this regard, Charlotte is similar to Ann as an SME principal. The emphasis on ***BALANCE*** in terms of teamwork and the emphatic ***FULL STOP*** on skills is typical of Charlotte.

I emphasised to **Sean,** as an ETD participant, the trend towards skills expectations and the danger of being too narrow. Sean appeared to be an advocate of some form of experiential learning, or at least marrying theory and practice, and recognised the danger of a kind of pendulum effect that rocks the boat, as illustrated with the emphasis of '***SKILLS, SURPRISE SURPRISE'*** in his talk. Sean appeared to be concerned about the skills gap that has been created by the swinging between education and training approaches. Sean was keen on balance and the '*practiced professional person'*. **Peggy**, as discussed in discourse 4a above, appeared to be an advocate of going beyond the basics. She went on to talk about one of her colleagues and herself as being CIM qualified but from very different backgrounds. Her colleague is product-oriented and Peggy people-oriented. Peggy thought that:

> *'If her and I were to go and have the same experience she would come and draw em 20 boxes of what happened, I would come and draw one big circle, pie chart, and that's how our brains work in different ways and marketing for me is a people experience'.*

For Peggy '*Marketing couldn't exist without people ………And I will only take on board marketing, sales, communication information if its **people based** and it's experiential'*.

Discourse 4c– Skills are important but can be bought

Beth, a partner in a kitchens and bathrooms business, agreed immediately that skills are important but my explanation about narrow vocationalism and my hints that people need a more critical and reflexive approach to work did not really have any impact. For Beth knowledge of the industry, products and knowing your market is what counts. Beth was not interested in training courses but agreed that '*interpersonal skills'* are important to the business. Beth confirmed that, '*If it was over and above what I've already mentioned, we would get somebody in to do it'* for resource reasons and '*So we would actually go to somebody who was an expert……We wouldn't necessarily go and join a course'*.

I attempted to get Beth to consider the narrowness of this approach but got nowhere with this line of logic. I asked about 'thinking outside of the box' kind of management to which Beth explained that her business has the skills for some things that are required, like advertising locally. It '*would be telling a story…it would be telling people…what we did and what we would want the information that they needed to know…'*

It was clear that Beth wanted to keep things basic and simple. **Jane** is an ETD participant who was the only participant to agree with Beth, possibly because Beth's business is relatively new, (Beth has years of experience involved with a substantial SME but has recently started afresh for various personal reasons) and Jane is currently in the role of adviser to new businesses. I asked Jane about narrowness, critical perspectives and a stress on certain words such as ***c r i t i c a l.*** As I spoke, Jane appeared to agree. Jane used some emphasis of her own on certain words and was obviously thinking and weighing things up as I was talking. Jane believes many training packages could do with losing '*some of the important theoretical stuff'*. Jane's experience of small businesses in the North East is that the owner-managers want to maintain control and that of them '*not wanting to sell any equity in their business and so on.*' So instead, another way of bringing in the necessary skills and competencies is by '*collaborations or strategic alliances which will help **YOU**. Almost buy in the skills'*. Jane's emphasis on ***YOU*** is a reflection of the self-help inherent in this context but sometimes there is no choice. Jane appeared to believe that some people cannot be trained in certain things. Rather than trying to train people to be sellers (when really, they are crafts or arts people who are good at designing or create products but not necessarily good as selling) the answer should be to set up some form of collaboration and get someone else to sell.

Theme 5 – The SME Marketing Curriculum Needs Horses For Courses

A list of typical marketing inputs was used in the interviews with the participants to get their views on the kind of things they would expect on a typical training course or more broadly perhaps in a textbook. This was done in an open, non-prescriptive way. Participants were also informed that I am also interested in education, training and development. The list included relationship marketing and critical perspectives. Participants were ask for anything that struck them as being missing from a marketing point of view and what they would add and indeed if there was anything they would take away as being irrelevant or inappropriate.

Theme 5 Supporting Discourses

I explained that marketing of the conventional sort (orthodoxy) with the 4Ps as well as the rest of the modernist models had been added to over time in terms of relationships and relationship marketing. I added that a third thing, the kind of critical thinking in terms of things that happen with managers, has possibilities. I suggested that the temptation is to see certain things as not being important such as sexual politics or power relations in the workplace.

Discourse 5a – Supporting the business by understanding culture and ethics and things other than the basics

Ann surprised me with her immediate interest in international aspects but when she elaborated, it became an obvious area that she would want to see in terms of understanding her own business and in terms of what it is imported from where. Clearly Ann, despite proclaiming not to have been on a marketing course, was aware of modernist marketing concepts such as segmentation, as evidenced with the following statement; '*Segmentation you know is very important, isn't it, in terms of where you fit'*. Ann went on to add to the list from an international perspective because of the ethical nature of the business that has some meaning to her. From international marketing Ann expected, '*An understanding of cultures…an understanding of the people of the country where we are actually buying from and selling to'* and it would be, '*very useful if you can speak the language'*.

There was no sign of emphasis with Ann but a calm and logical link between business needs and less than orthodox content. In response to my questioning and probing and my raising the issue of criticality, **Charlotte** was immediately emphatic and responded:

> '*It's **MUCH**, much more important'* and emphasised the greasy pole '***STUFF***' of big companies and then talked of visibility where there is, '*nowhere to hide in a small company…emm and so any ……faults or tensions or emm…flirtations or…they are absolutely obvious'*.

Charlotte then talked of an employee so used to hiding in big companies that the employee tried to:

> *'literally transplant – it's the plonking thing again – what she'd learnt in a very large company , lock stock and barrel onto this one, and it didn't work. **HUH**, I mean she's not alone'.*

Charlotte saw similarities between running a small business and being in the voluntary sector where relationships are important. She stated:

> *'you get a lot more fussed …so emm…people are asking different things, you know there's pressure in one direction then everybody's got there…can you meet this, can you meet that…and in that context…emm…relationships are very, very important'.*

Discourse 5b – Keeping it basic and simple

In contrast to **Ann**, **Beth** was puzzled when asked about the more critical ideas regarding the content of training or books and at first answered with an '*Emmmm?'* I had to explain and probe further but Beth was still confused and thought I was suggesting some sort of targeting by gender. I explained further about '*ethical considerations emm…workplace considerations of the nature of which there may be gender issues such as women…*'. Beth understood but put it very simply in terms of heavy lifting being a requirement for fitters where '*it could be problematic to have somebody who was disabled because of the nature of the business'.* It dawned on me by this response that Beth was simply not interested in things other than the very basics and what she sees as absolutely necessary. Her outlook of '*making sure that your name's out there and let people know that you're there and keeping that in mind'* is simple, especially from a marketing perspective. Beth would simply use suppliers' literature and '*generate more business through word of mouth…and hopefully to get the business…repeat business',* hinting at her relational approach with customers.

In similar fashion **Charles** and **Geoff,** both strictly ETD participants, believed training should be kept to the basics. **Geoff** for the most part as a trainer was, I believe, referring to smaller businesses when he advocated basic training. Geoff also advocated a broader approach to incorporate things other than marketing but which are linked such as '*operational activities rather than marketing activities'.* However Geoff is the ETD participant who does concede that thinking, rather than doing, is important while the business is growing, as evidenced by his saying '*Start **THINKING** about the business instead of **DOING** the business'.* Geoff appears to feel that '*as things grow…………It's the micro business owner who has to be in to all of these topics at the same time and is responsible for it all'.*

Discourse 5c – Changing relationships

Jack was not the only participant to recognise the importance of relationships to business, but Jack was the only one to talk about the personal side of relationships and change. Jack felt that personal relationships are important and '*The main thing is the person that you're dealing with. If you're …if you're dealing with someone you get on* *with, much more likely to buy from them than someone that I don't get on with'.* Jack gave an example of purchasing from a supplier he liked as opposed to one with cheaper prices because, '*they can be a little bit cheaper sometimes but I wouldn't buy from them because I don't get on with the guy, so in the business-to- business world getting on with the person that you're dealing with is paramount'.* The corollary to this is that if Jack did not like a supplier then the relationship would change.

Discourse 5d – Creativity and innovation in delivery

Dave, as an orthodox and relational marketing trainer, believes that for credibility sake we have to get '*back to the market place'* in terms of '*bog standard training needs analysis'*. However, Dave felt that a longer-term view is essential for development and not just one or two '*training days'*. I asked Dave to elaborate on what he meant by that and he confirmed what he was really getting at was developing creativity and innovation in training terms in order to make a difference in delivery. Dave saw this in terms of '*organisational culture which impacts on marketing…'* and lets the ETD package '*stand out from the crowd…and really…literally go across all of those customer-facing activities'.* This would be dependent on investment but Dave is steadfastly an orthodox marketer at times with '*you **KNOW**…very ordinary stuff in terms of trade fairs, exhibitions, em…getting customer feedback……'.* Dave advocated '*creative management techniques that we've all been exposed to in some way whether its brainstorming and the stuff like Najaro creative gaps…'.* In Dave's opinion, successful firms do this and have to have *'the balls and confidence to do it'.*

I asked Dave to elaborate on what he meant by *'marketing things and …you said it, it's obvious stuff…'* Dave replied, '*Yeah, operational stuff isn't it'.* I attempted to get Dave to explain this paradoxical orthodoxy against '*innovation and creativity'* and Dave obliged, explaining this in terms of '*training for the company or training for individuals'.* If it is the former then, in his words, '*Hopefully the trainers come up with a package that meets the vision of the company'* and teach how you can '*facilitate and promote that vision'.* Dave appeared to be talking in terms of a '*strategic overview of where the company wants to go to'.* The short term is the operational side and in his words, '*While the longer term, a year plus, hopefully you have that broader vision in terms of moving from middle market to prestige brand in some way…or targeting particular types of key customers and what sort of imagery and performance indicators you need to put in place'.* Dave was unsure he had answered my question and appeared perhaps uncertain of his own answer as he stated, '*…em…does that sound…I don't know whether that's going down the line you're after really Paul'.*

Discourse 5e – Necessary evil enforcement and enlightenment

Sean interpreted my questioning in terms of two types of SME. The first being the type that does certain things because its principals know they have to be done and the more enlightened type where the principals know it makes sense. Sean saw a mix of inputs with core elements. In his opinion, inputs will be '*largely determined by the type of company……… but I think once you get outside of that core then you need to be a bit more selective'.* Sean compared bagging sand-type companies to dot com-type companies to illustrate and suggested that the marketing mix is at the core but in '*business-to-business markets…market**ING** happens'.* For Sean, more enlightened companies not only understand their business as well as what Sean described as standard marketing (orthodoxy), '*But they would identify what their, if you like, their **TARGET** business-to-business partnerships might be'*. In Sean's opinion this is how these businesses '*develop'* and '*emm… some of their own inputs to suit the inputs of the others …so there's a match there, so there's a synergy there'.* There was a hint of the relational here but his emphasis on the ***ING*** of marketing and on ***TARGET*** underlined Sean's marketing orthodoxy.

Sean also believes that enlightened SMEs see the benefits of dealing with '*necessary evils'* that make up internal management and governance issues. In his opinion, rather than just paying '*lip service'* it is better to adopt '*a more enlightened approach'* in order to '*provide the development potential'.*

Theme 6 – SME Marketing is Infused With Relational Perspectives

The concept that marketing is about relationships in some respect, emerged quite naturally and early on in most of the interviews and was a recurring theme in the talk of most of the participants.

Theme 6 Supporting Discourses

In the next line of questioning, I attempted to explore further the relational approaches to marketing with the participants. As it turned out less discourses emerged from the texts than I had expected.

Discourse 6a – Relationships are crucial

Given the ethical base of **Ann's** business, I presumed she would not want to have a relationship with someone who would damage that ethical base. Ann agreed with this in terms of suppliers. I suggested that relational approaches include employees and other stakeholders. Ann thought every relationship is '*absolutely crucial'* to growing the business and has been from the start and stated '*I said before that marketing was at the core but I guess there's a marketing/relationship ……thing there'*.

Ann explained her business's ethical stance on suppliers, renewable sources, packaging and not sending out '*millions of mail shots that don't actually mean anything but use loads of bits of paper'*. I probed a little further on how these relationships can be fostered and asked '*…what would you like them to be like?'* Ann was specifically concerned about respect, trust and honesty within the team of people who '*act as consultants and will go out to advise customers and potential customers'*.

Ann was talking about the core of the business that in part is the vision involving '*effective learning environments for young children. That's backed by the training that we offer…em…all of those relationships are based on mutual respect and trust'*. Ann was concerned that staff are honest and trust is created and that solutions are found before '*we get into a crisis situation which will impact on our own business'*. Ann felt it was about expectations where, '*People feel valued for their contribution …and excited, which is another driving force which often lifts a lot of staff'*.

In a not dissimilar vein to Ann, **Charlotte** saw relationships in a community and stakeholder kind of way. She described relationships as, 'w*ell no they're actually…it actually means that it goes up and down and from side to side'.* Charlotte set her business up in 2000, a time according to Charlotte, when technology was taking over everything:

> '*And my contention then was as it is now is bollocks because it's people who are the business……people…… people choose. They don't just choose on the 4Ps, they actually choose on the relationships that they have with key people in another organization'.*

Charlotte's business is founded on relationships, not pricing or one-off sales. For Charlotte, '*If you have customers who you develop relationships with …and relationships with people who work for you. They'll do that'.*

I emphasised the word, ***r e l a t i o n a l*** and suggested there is a more holistic context rather than just selling. Charlotte then talked about her '*building a place in the community'.* Charlotte had set her business up in the dot com years when, '*It was the fast buck time, you know, into the market place, fast buck, exit, start again'.* Charlotte believed this has changed and companies are, '*Putting something back in…emm…… through social responsibility now'.* Charlotte has a lot of big company experience but for Charlotte now it is not '*…just in existence to make, you know, lots and lots of pounds or dollars with a very sharp teeth approach'.* She thought, '*It makes better sense to* ***doooo****, to engage all of your stakeholders'.* At this point Charlotte mentioned her family and in particular her father. This, for Charlotte, was where her sense of ethics, code of conduct and morals stem from, which extend into all aspects of her life. She believed that post-Enron '*that's a much, much* ***BIGGER*** *area of relationships. The strategic importance of relationships … you know it's very funny reading about strategy, it's terrific isn't it?'*

Her emphasis on ***doooo*** and ***BIGGER*** suggests a solid commitment and recognition of the importance of relationship in the wider community.

Discourse 6b – Relationships are obvious and inevitable

Beth was interested in '*repeated business'* and explained how she kept customers 'sweet'. These are often not her own customers but her customers' customers who are consumers of the products Beth's business supplies in the chain of events. Beth will send flowers or knock '*something off the margin'* but generally '*be seen to be putting things right and making things as comfortable as possible and developing the relationship'.* Another of the SME principals, **Jack,** I think found this line of questioning banal and stating the obvious. Jack emphasised the acknowledgement of the existence of the 4Ps and saw this as central to the business but not marketing where '*relationship marketing for me is the most important **BUT** yes the 4Ps are there as well, they have to be otherwise you wouldn't have a business without them'*. For Jack it is the '*crux of the business rather than marketing'*.

On the ETD side, participants **Sid, Dave, Geoff** and **Charles** were quite vocal in this area of inquiry. **Geoff** had a particular take on relationships being a natural thing where '*You could see it happening all around you'*, for example in local supermarkets where the experience can be good, bad or indifferent. I asked Geoff to expand further on networking at, for example, business clubs. I then discovered this is central to what Geoff as an ETD adviser does in terms of helping small business people to network. Geoff is, in his own words, '*…very in to networking now……it's a great way for people to expand their horizons, not necessarily just to get business'.* It is about learning from others and applying it by '*being **AMONGST** similar people, amongst people who are doing similar things'* but it does not have to be the same kind of business. At first people may be reserved at such events but after a few months of interaction '*…they just absorb it without consciously thinking about it'*.

Discourse 6c – Relationships and cobbler's shoes again

At first, Peggy misunderstood my questions regarding relationships by stating '*Relationships between different parts of the mix?'* Upon clarification of why I used the word '*relation**al**'*, with the obvious emphasis on the ***al,*** Peggy understood what I was discussing. She had thought it was about relationships between elements of the marketing mix and I suppose I might have come across as an academic trying to test her on a simple academic marketing model. Peggy told me that her organisation has a '*CRM system. We have, it's account management and its long-term relationships. It's a case of emm,…I mean I* ***train'***

Peggy explained that she is a sales trainer and does '*needs analysis'* which is *'fact finding'* in order to establish '*some key needs for your product'* and explained the job and then went on to suggest what that means to a client. Peggy said she will go to great lengths to advise clients. If, for example, she knows nothing about '*exporting to,* ***toooooo****,* ***Timbuktu***' she will:

> '*go and* ***find*** *the expert on Timbuktu. Not only the expert on Timbuktu but his best mate who is the expert on my client's product in Timbuktu and what network is there for him and I'll go a do all of that research and that work for my client, come back and give that to my client'.*

Peggy called this *'the added value'* and noted that it was part of the job of her agency. If they cannot do it directly they will go outside to help the business even if it means losing on it because, in her words, *'I'll get the benefits of that long term and it's all long term relationships sort of thing'.* Peggy expanded on this further, upon my prompting, explained her role more, and links this into the relationships her organisation has. Peggy liked the term '*who's who in the zoo'* to describe her staff and the way in which her organisation is structured. Peggy described the difficulties of relationships between the four departments in her organisation and then the relationships between hers and other agencies. The complexity of relationships became clear. People in central roles have internal customers and there are both internal and external communications which gets difficult and requires a strong '*internal relationship strategy with our partners'.*

Peggy ended with '*Cobbler's shoes, I think, again',* which I understand to mean things are such that the cobbler, rather like the mechanic and his own car, is so busy tending to and mending other people's shoes, he neglects his own.

Discourse 6d – Relationships are risk reducers

I asked **Jane** the same kind of question and she was immediate in her response regarding bringing businesses together by stating, ‘*Yeah, yeah’* and added that this can come from meeting at training courses. The businesses do not have to be the same for a relationship to be struck but often they are complementary. Jane used the example of photography and wedding cakes where she has seen ‘*a really good relationship’* formed and where joint selling and promotion has occurred. Therefore, for Jane, it seems it is not about the fit of the product but rather ‘*the fit of the relationship’.* Small businesses can collaborate in clusters and that it is:

> ‘*a supportive way of em, developing and certainly I know women entrepreneurs find that that is a really good way of em…perhaps taking more risks because that was one of the issues that came out of research that we found about women entrepreneurs was that em levels of risks were lower’.*

Jane also talked about how it might take longer to establish a business but by building a business through relationships there are higher chances of survival.

Theme 7 – Marketing is About People Not a Science, Art or Postmodern Debate

My line of inquiry moved on to explore a more critical perspective on marketing. I explained traditional and relational marketing which has been developed over time and that there is a third perspective that is different from the traditional marketing or relational marketing i.e. there is the critical ‘other things matter’, internally and externally, perspective.

Theme 7 Supporting Discourses

I suggested that orthodoxy brings things like publicity and other communication, while relational brings in the perspective that involves mutual respect and trust, and the critical perspective that involves ethical considerations with an emphasis placed on people.

Discourse 7a – Marketing is networking

Two of the participants said things that were explicit about relational marketing, people and networking. This, perhaps for the first time, felt to me to be combining relational and critical perspectives, and this is why it is included here rather than just in the previous theme. SME principal **Ann** did not like the word stakeholders but had been trying to develop internal relationships with employees to develop, '*an engaged staff team'* because Ann believes that it is crucial to the business and sales that '*from the very first telephone call right the way through to the end delivery …and the after sales service'* works. Ann's employees are keen on training and they stay in the business rather than leave. Ann tries to engender a sense of achievement with realistic targets in order to retain staff:

> *'The more we put into them in terms of the skill base…em…the more effective they are for the company. …………And also in terms of staff retention, its significant…em…you know we want to keep our staff who we have invested in and in order to do that they need to feel valued…'*

I asked about networking and Ann confirmed that the business relies on this to *'raise the profile of our company and to spread the message and have other people you know spread that message on our behalf really'*. I press a little further on the how to network issue and use the example of business clubs, but there is a particular kind of networking going on with Ann. She belongs to a '*professional institute…em…of management'* but confesses she could make more of that and through attendances at other meetings:

> *'it is true that through **THAT**, through attendances at functions or…em…talks, seminars. When I think about it I have actually made new links which have actually been really quite useful in terms perhaps of gaining financial advice or …em…signposting to other areas of expertise that we don't have within the company so yeah, it is beneficial'.*

Ann wants to develop more this way with conference attendances and '*professionally within the senior management team we have you know extensive professional networks that we do utilise'.* Ann sees it as important to be part of '*effective learning environments for children'* and be '*part of the research that's going on…I'm thinking particularly in terms of brain development and movement play'.*

On the ETD side **Dave** expressed a networking *'birds of a feather'* kind of attitude but ties this in with social responsibility in business generally, and in this sense is not unlike Charlotte in an earlier discourse on relationships with community, especially since Dave thinks this goes '*back to the owner-manager personality'*. Dave thinks businesses have to be far more sensitive and environmentally aware and '*the role it plays in the community……and ……from the marketing perspective of …how you position, position the company'*. Dave thinks that developing policy around these ideas will help '*start attracting the consumer or the business partner who hopefully has some sort of shared values'*. Hence Dave's *'birds of a feather flock together'* dictum. I suggest this is a kind of ethical '*Coop Bank'* position and Dave agrees with '*Yes, yes……It's like sort of Fair Trade isn't it……you know people levitate towards that'*.

Neither Ann nor Dave had any real emphasis in their talk and I assume this idea of networking is a given in their SME worlds as it seems it would be difficult to get away from it.

Discourse 7b – Marketing is about big business

A discourse that suggests that with some SMEs, perhaps at the smaller end, things are basic and marketing is seen as basic and simple and not the kind of marketing perhaps I was thought to represent. I had suggested to **Beth** that she appeared not to have a critical perspective and that marketing seemed simple and straightforward in her business. Beth was rather puzzled by the question ('*Ummm'?),* I had to try to explain further, and Beth felt the business would '*really have to grow to be able to do that'*. Beth does not want to be '*a multi, international company. We just want to be small and to be successful and to make a living out of it'*.

Discourse 7c – Marketing is about people not robots – and a Babel Fish

In contrast to Beth, **Jack,** who has a similar sized business, believes you can have people of a robotic nature in large organisations '*where the business process can be broken down into those stages'*. In Jack's business it is a question of not wanting to set his right hand man '*off like a robot'* because it might be imperative that he is able to react to situations. For **Charlotte** who has a larger business than either Beth or Jack, critical thinking for herself and the people in her business is central. We talk at length about differences in gender, women in business and political correctness. I move back onto the idea of '*plonking'* and the orthodoxy, relationships and a more critical approach to marketing and management and Charlotte is patient, occasionally appearing to agree with an '*mmm'* here and an '*mmmm'* there. I talk around issues until finally Charlotte gets started. While Charlotte had advocated simplicity for clarity earlier in the interview, she now avoided being too simple in terms of what might be left out by being comprehensive in terms of what should be included. Charlotte sees the 4Ps of marketing as *'pretty hard-nosed Ps'* she feels that ***'that's not the only thing that there is'*** **a**nd almost sings this for emphasis. Charlotte is a people person. The 4Ps are '*all about, you know,* ***POSITION AND PLACE AND PRICE AND PRODUCT'*** and raps the table for effect. Charlotte believes that:

> '*unless you've got a …**phewwww**…some decent people who are actually translating those things into emm…into sales and relationships you might as well finish up the …because…you can spend millions on a marketing campaign but if a person gets on the phone in our office and is rude you've wasted…and I think that's the thing isn't it, you can have, you can do all of that stuff, but actually unless there's a person who can translate that …emm…its almost like the Babel Fish…emm…'*

I am unaware of this reference to The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy but Charlotte explains:

> *'……See the Babel Fish can read …can understand what everybody's saying…and from this book…if you do all stuff…from one end and you don't understand want… again you might as well give up and go home and that's …you know it's actually being able to …once somebody can lead your 4Ps and warm them up so people want them above the rest of the competition and …its about that whole feeling of, you know……but it's not, it's not the only …left brain stuff its the people…I'm not good on left brain…'.*

I add that there is an old PR saying that is similar in terms of what you know about an organization and you know more '*from the reception you get than you would from the chairman's statement in the company report'.* Charlotte agrees.

> '*Course you do…it's like that whole thing about Enron, you know err corporate governance, it's all sticky plaster stuff.* ***WE SHOULD NOT BE***

> ***HAVING*** *to tell people…shouldn’t have to be… legislate for decent corporate behaviour’.*

I press a little further to move away from the obvious passion that Charlotte has for relationships and community. I emphasise the idea of moving from simple linear relationships. Charlotte thinks the old-fashioned idea of a market place with widgets where the ‘*perceived view, you know* ***D, D, D, D, D …LINEAR*** *pattern’* prevails. Rather, Charlotte believes in developing relationships where ‘*things are no longer fixed in space and time’* and you have to ‘*think about everybody that you meet as a potential customer, or, or collab…’*. For Charlotte, things are dynamic and customers more discerning and you do not know where these relationships are coming from.

Discourse 7d – Marketing is about leadership

My inquiry arrived at another discourse i.e. marketing being about leadership. **Peggy**, in a long response, talks about her role in the enterprise agency but then her involvement with the small business she shares with her partner. For Peggy ‘*It’s cultural’* and it is about ‘*approaches to relationship selling with the context of the* ***l e a d e r s h i p*** *and the culture’*. Peggy is talking about attitudes towards marketing in different organisations that affect the kind of marketing mix and relationship selling ‘***HUGELY’***. This is somewhat paradoxical to me at first until I realise what Peggy means. Peggy has no hesitation to mix marketing orthodoxy with relationship marketing. Peggy recalls her time in a company that ‘*was a very relationship selling, very strong relationship selling company’*. Peggy talks of jarring occurring between her and the rest of the team on an away day because she had been taught the marketing orthodox way:

> ‘*and I was totally jarring with the rest of the management team. And it wasn’t just the management team, it was the whole culture and emm…****s o s u r e*** *context of the company emm to think and to act in that way emm and missed out a whole chunk which any marketeer would, would, you know throw up their arms in disgust at’.*

The emphasis placed on ***l e a d e r s h i p, HUGELY*** and ***s o s u r e*** shows Peggy to be confident, convinced and convincing that leadership stems from marketing. Peggy goes on with a lengthy piece on her role in a small firm that happens to be in the funeral sector and she extends her ideas about culture and leadership into this and talks about the '***context'*** of the way SMEs in this sector are run. She talks about the culture and the way things are done by '*the hierarchy old fellows who've known each other 50 odd* years'. Things are changing, with a new generation waiting to step in but who '*don't want to be family led any more they want to be market led'.* This sector has never been market led but the younger generation '*are now trying to question what they're doing*'.

Theme 8 – There are many interpretations of ETD in SME-land

Whatever happens within ETD it has to be current and relevant to the short term. Longer-term education has a role to play in terms of development of both individuals and the business.

Theme 8 supporting discourses

I discuss with the participants ETD generally and marketing ETD in particular. This sees discourse emerge that illustrates how ETD is both welcome and problematic.

Discourse 8a – Enterprise and development training is for us

Ann, the SME principal who likes to acquire knowledge agrees that she could do with more marketing education but concentrates on child development that is at the core of the business. Professional marketing organisations could be approached on a need to know basis. If Ann needed marketing research she would '*contact the Market Research Society and look for a list of their members, see who was in the area, how that, you know…specific interest…em…in our area of work*'*.* I ask about Ann's experience of enterprise agencies. She talks of regeneration packages and has the same outlook as with the professional bodies as in '*we would look at things as, as we needed to really…… you know use One North East and …Project North East and things like that'.*

Ann would like something strategic or '*a sort of bigger picture if you like and …eh…the steps necessary to …**TO GET THERE**'* for senior management. Ann wants to be successful regionally and to grow and perhaps America might be interesting but Ann wants to have '*the knowledge, confidence and everything else that goes with it to make that move…… but I guess what I'm saying is that they need to be at the level so that they are not operating by good fortune'.*

In terms of staff Ann returns to her hobby horse of disappointment with people with degrees and gives the example of someone responsible for communications who could not spell '*where you have to…to correct texts before its actually …you know goes anywhere'.* Ann concedes this is difficult and doubts whether even using 'r*ecruitment consultants or anything like that would give you any better outcomes.'* This frustration underlines a dilemma for SMEs. Investment in the individual costs whether this be '*people on the front line'* who do the operational work such as '*meeting, greeting people, selling...em…giving people positive experiences of using our company'* or senior managers with whom there is an expectation of being able to '*shape that idea and either take it forward or not'*. It is important that staff have experience to add to knowledge but Ann concedes it is difficult on limited resources where '*you **CANNOT** just have a free-for-all for staff in terms of training. It takes a huge amount of investment in both time and money'.*

Discourse 8b – Enterprise and development training is not for us

In the same vein, I ask **Jack** about ETD, enterprise agency-type training and what individuals and the business might need. Jack is much more concise than Ann. Jack sees the benefits of training but does not have resources to pay for it. '*I mean we don't really have anything structured within here'*. Jack has trained his right hand man himself 't*o be a clone of me really'* but overall Jack does not bother with the enterprise agencies and Jack adds *'I don't know what you…ah…sort of you know…we don't really have much contact with that sort of…'*.

Discourse 8c – Management is organic and democratic and you need this in development

Charlotte, in her usual strident self, goes straight into styles of management with '*It's organic, it's, it's, organic and democratic'*. However, there are times when '*autocratic stuff is actually far more appropriate than the organic, developmental stuff*'. I ask if this is spectrum and Charlotte is unequivocal. She likes to keep her options open '*for as long as possible so I can then actually follow the one that I think is best suited to where I want to go'*. Her staff might prefer the structure of a mechanical approach so that '*they have tasks to follow and things to do, so that it's much, much more linear'*. Charlotte has come to realise that she had '*to give them back those roles'* because her team are a '*very, very intelligent group of people which I……they're far more intellectual, far brighter than I am'*. Charlotte feels the need to keep them happy and fulfilled by constantly juggling 'e*ven if it's …not knowingly…but that's what you have to do'*.

Discourse 8d –You have to keep SME people 'at it', so offer them more than mere ETD

For **Sid**, in his quite vast experience in SMEs, as an SME principal and now also as an ETD adviser, the problem is engaging SME people with training in order to develop and to do this you have to maintain '***SOME FORM OF***' *umbilical connection'*. Sid thinks SME people are '*the world's worst for letting things go astray'* so that '***YOU**, as the trainer are satisfied that ……you've altered their behaviour in a permanent way towards what you've been trying to get over to them'*. Therefore, Sid is concerned that '*you've developed their competencies etc'*. For Sid it is a question of '*keeping them at it. Now, however gently you throw stuff at them or lead them to stuff just keep them at it*'. **Dave** talks about SME owner-manager's egos driving them on to wanting more than a training package. They need to be able to '*talk the talk'* and it is the ones with the vision who '*build up wider knowledge which enables them to **ASK** pertinent questions and put people on the spot'*.

Discourse 8e – Easiest, cheapest, quickest or it has to be practical and experiential

For **Geoff** when the owner-manager '*stops **DOING** business and starts **THINKING** business'* development occurs but the one-man-band cannot stop doing and therefore '*perhaps enlist the help of somebody else to do the thinking, help him start make that move'.* **Jane** responds to the initial questioning with a '*learning by doing appr…approach within a training session itself*'. Jane thinks that marketing is important in all aspects of the business and '*perhaps that can only be experienced by actual action, within a training/marketing context rather than each being told'.*

Peggy is different from Geoff and Jane. All are ETD advisers but possibly because of her training needs analysis experience Peggy immediately says '*Workshops'* in response to my original questioning and I try to probe further but Peggy is somebody with her own business experience and has a key marketing ETD role in an enterprise agency and knows what she is about. For Peggy it is the '*Easiest, cheapest, quickest (laughs loudly)…errrrrrrr…'.* That is what is important to the SME in Peggy's view because it is less hassle. I go a little further because I sense there is more and Peggy provides it in terms of strength of management style and the constraint on the business the management can be. Peggy feels principals will '***demand** what they want **AND** it is a very difficult thing as a supplier with morals'.* Peggy is alluding to giving the client what he wants even though you know its wrong '***KNOWING** that it's not what the business needs……because at the end of the day we've still got a target to hit and it's that balance…'.* Peggy goes on to talk about the kind of enterprise agency for which she works. It is branded and it is not-for-profit and '*we don't sell people things they **d o n ' t n e e d'**.* However, Peggy points out that the client may still want it 'and *it's very difficult to walk away from that……. …and who are* **we** *to make that judgment and that call?*

Theme 9 – ETD Can Be Delivered but There are Many and Changing Ways to Delivery

The conventional way of delivering ETD did not seem to me to fit with most of the participants, so my inquiry began its last phase with a look at outcomes participants would expect if they engaged with ETD activities, especially marketing activities, and what their people would get out of it and bring back to the business.

Theme 9 supporting discourses

I began this last area by asking about expected outcomes and what the business would support in terms of ETD. I mentioned degree and diploma or just simply training for an open approach to participants.

Discourse 9a – Learning something as a team that fits in with the business

Ann talked of '*the needs of particular staff groups*' being different and on different levels. Ann agrees with '*people developing themselves personally'* but while Ann would like to support people '*it's got to be something that fits with the business'.* Ann still feels that '*thinking employees should grow and develop'*. I press Ann on the kind of outcome she wants and Ann immediately says '*enhance their……thinking skills'.* Ann thinks this is '*analytical stuff*' depending upon level but Ann returned to the same concern by expecting the:

> '*outcome to be that their performance within the business would be enhanced in some way……come back with perhaps up to date ideas that we can input into the business, new ways of doing things, em… but useful ways'*.

I ask Ann if by level she means on the level of employee, as opposed to a different kind of employee, say somebody from the senior management team. Ann expects the latter to be educated, to have a lot of knowledge and to have the '*ability to think critically and an understanding of the business world and their role within the various components that make up all organisations'.* Ann believes it is a question of balance. Senior staff can undertake development at seminars and the like but they too could leave and '*there goes your investment…so it's very much a balance, isn't it?'*

Ann wants a creative environment where barriers are removed and where '*a common language within the organisation'* exists '*so people actually feel part of where we're* *trying to go, part of the journey if you like'.* Ann mentions onsite training for staff and hints at some form of training needs analysis for the team. Ann is more concerned about what '*fits within their daily work within the organisation and understand that what they're doing is actually part of the marketing of the organisation'*. Ann stresses '***team effort'*** and bringing people together to have '*a bit of fun as a team and learning together'.* Ann is keen on in-house delivery and likes the idea of tailor made, objective provision because '*It's quite difficult when you're just caught up in the day to day reality of the business and that sort of thing'.* While Ann wants to support individuals, it has to be for the business also, even if it was a PhD (presumably in child development given the nature of Ann's business) and clearly, the tension is still there between resources and investing in both people and the business.

Discourse 9b – Nothing fits our business

Jack and **Beth** are both good examples of this discourse. Neither is enthusiastic about going on training courses and while Jack is not against some form of training to meet a need identified in the business, Beth rejected this out of hand in favour of buying in any technical skills that may be required. I did try, as with all participants, to explore the development of the person and the business and looked for different levels of skills and ways of delivery but Beth was steadfast around the simple plans they want to produce and to use this service as a marketing technique. '*The only way we would develop the person is for them to actually produce plans…making sure that it's presented in a specific way so that the customer…instead of a scrappy bit of paper, folded up in an envelop…'*.

Discourse 9c– Learning is experiential

The responses from **Charlotte, Sean** and **Peggy** are in many ways similar. Charlotte is as clear as ever and straight into her stride. Charlotte sees no difference whether delivery of ETD is in a workplace or an educational establishment. I used the example of companies getting together and hosting an event and Charlotte immediately retorted '*Which is what I call experiential learning……That's what I do'.* I explained that I empathise with what Charlotte is saying but Charlotte felt the need to qualify what she has said. Charlotte used to believe learning experientially was the only way but now thinks that '*it's only a bit of the picture and it needs balancing* ***byyyy*** *even if, even if it's* ***o n l y*** *to endorse what actually …is taught'.* Charlotte thinks that not everybody benefits from experiential learning '*in ……terms of their upskilling, their emm ……you know, particularly with soft skills……That's not the way their brains are geared. They need something else'.* What Charlotte is getting at is that some people pick things up and need to translate them into their own '*jargon'* but '*there's also stuff that you can't pick up. I mean you can't pick up ……****X*** *just through experience. You know there are some things, you know, legal* ***FORM*** *or financial* ***THING*** *or …that you can't pick up through experience'.*

I press a little further on functional/technical and more critical skills and Charlotte agrees there are technical skills for '*a shop floor operator'* but '*there are experiential things that you can learn…you can't, can't teach everybody to be a world class runner, you know'*. Charlotte thinks it is a bit of both, a combination. However, this is qualified by the idea of access. Charlotte believes in facilitation in terms of having '*the handbook and access to experience'.* Charlotte feels she is in the business of the promotion of '*culture change'* through trying '*to get more people to set up their own businesses, you know try to get more people to be enterprising in the work place and take risks'*. What Charlotte does with her business as it happens is '*experiential. That's,* ***t h a t i s w h a t I d o'.***

Charlotte felt though that before she started she would have benefited from '*real practical nuts and bolts things'* that apply to everybody and '*you need to have that framework …and then the experiential stuff enriches the framework. I think either one or the other …then it becomes much harder work'.*

Discourse 9d– Whatever it is there has to be a measurable result

Both **Sid** and **Charles** are keen on measurable results in ETD, regardless of mode of delivery. I ask the usual on ETD and delivery, floating the ideas of, for example, '*textbooks or manuals or courses'.* However, Charles starts with something I did not mention in my preamble. Charles immediately talks of '*work-****BASED*** *training'* being always of interest. Charles likes to visit clients rather than provide training in a university because of the opportunity to get a feel '*the organisation from the second* *you walk in the reception. You know a lot about their culture from the state of the car park…emm, you can just read it like a book'.* For Charles it is *'just getting in an environment that they're comfortable with'* and it is about outcomes, *'outcome-driven is the phrase that I would use for it, for the training'.*

Dscourse 9e – Learning is best when it's social

Four of the ETD participants (**Dave, Jane, Geoff** and **Heather**) are in favour of a kind of social intercourse that is an ingredient in the learning process. Dave has noticed interaction between small firm owner-managers, on marketing training courses, that is informal and welcome. The emphasis on **SUCK** is quite evocative of the intensity witnessed by Dave who feels that interaction is key and they deliberately and intentionally learn from other people, or at least '*the ones with better vision'* do who '*are always looking to ... **SUCK** in new ideas from other people because he realises they don't know everything'.* I suggest there might be an analogy with traditional shopping and the Internet, the idea that *'people will not give up shopping because it's social and is tactile'.* Dave likes the analogy '*you want to go with your friends, you can touch, you can feel, you can have a coffee, you can talk and chat etc. emm... and I think with SMEs as well, you know they can feel very isolated...'.* Dave thinks people love talking to other people, to other course members about what they are doing and thinking '*and you're using other people as sounding boards'.*

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings, in terms of themes and discourses, which emerged from the narratives found in the research texts of the fourteen participants of this study. The nine themes discerned provided accompanying discourses, arrived at through an analysis of the research texts, using a form of Discourse Analysis. The themes deal with the existence and nature of SME marketing, with orthodox, relational and critical marketing perspectives and with ETD issues such as skills and delivery.

The chapter that follows, chapter seven, is a discussion that is a synthesis of these findings with the issues raised in the literature review presented earlier in the thesis.

CHAPTER SEVEN - DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter is a consideration of the findings from the analysis of the research texts and those from the literature. As such it produces synergy that results in series of points of discussion that contribute to the debate on the nature of marketing in SMEs and issues around ETD in such contexts in relation to orthodox, critical and relational marketing. In this discussion, I read across the themes and discourses presented in chapter six but keep the same structure. I therefore use the themes and accompanying discourses as a foundation so that the reader can easily follow my reasoning for combining salient points from the literature with points of analysis from the research texts. In this chapter I move from theme to theme, beginning in Theme 1, moving through ideas and notions on orthodox marketing, ETD, relational and critical marketing until I finally arrive at marketing, ETD and delivery in Theme 9.

Theme 1: SME marketing is an acceptable notion

This theme is very simple. I was looking for evidence either way in the research texts during the analysis and found that none of the participants tried to subvert the idea of marketing in their responses. So on the surface at least marketing is an acceptable notion in the SME world of practitioners and ETD people. The literature also does not question the existence of marketing for SMEs, only its nature, which is explored in the forthcoming themes. I originally thought I had some clear anecdotal evidence in the idea that the word marketing might be missing from SME vocabulary. The SME principals' vocabulary is admittedly not necessarily the same as that of the SME advisers.

Nature of SMEs and personalities and commonalities

The SME literature suggests that such organisations will differ from larger companies on parameters other than just size (Hill, 2001). It is recognised that the large firm model is not appropriate for SMEs that are not simply a scaled down version of the larger firm (Wynnczyk et al, 1993, Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). There is a danger of lack of resources and organisation leading to deficient decision making when the SME is characterised by its entrepreneurial principal (Carson, 1995, Deacon, 2002). Limited resources with one person at the helm and lack of functionalised structures with conflicting demands might mean that being proactive in relation to marketing is seen as an expensive irrelevance. Personality is an unknown quantity and includes past upbringing and personal goals (Gilmore 2002). The social impact of the owner-manager or entrepreneur on the SME's identity is strong (Carson et al, 1995, Cromie, 1994, O'Donell and Cummins, 1999). Personalities and commonalities are fundamental (Carson 2002, Enright, 2002) and this is a well-developed argument from the 1970s and 1980s (for example Gibb 1983, Birley & Gibb 1984, Bathie 1985), this being linked to qualities of SME owner-managers/entrepreneurs that directs orientation. Some of this can be seen in the research texts of this thesis.

It was stated from the outset in this thesis that the intention is not to address personality per se but inevitably commentary has already been made in chapter six as to what the participants are like as people and this is an important aspect of who and what they are in their role as SME principal and ETD person. For example, **Beth** expresses a desire for the business to remain small and this is a life style choice. The discourse emerging from the research text of **Charlotte** in particular, another of the SME principals but also an adviser to small firms and SMEs, from the outset is about the self in relation to SME marketing practice. This reflects a self confident, social, community relationship-type characteristic of SME principals like Charlotte.

SME people are tribal in terms of sector/group, have spontaneity, are intuitive, have complexity, seize the opportunity and have company-specific marketing awareness (Enright, 2002). The entrepreneur has innovation, is an achiever, takes risks, is independent and has freedom (Bridge et al 1998). Attitude is all important regarding people acquiring resources and promoting the enterprise (Carson, 1995). Many of these characteristics can be seen in the research texts of the SME participants and some of the ETD participants who were or still are involved with running a small firm or SME. **Sid, Charlotte, Peggy** and **Heather** fall into this category. There are differences across the various research texts that emerge between the SME and ETD participants and a good deal of commonality can be seen between the SME participants and within the ETD participants and across the two groups, especially where participants have been or are still in both camps.

Later in the interviews issues such as dealing with staff morale, pregnancy and home life, and ethical issues come high on some of the participants' agenda. This is potentially part of the tribalism of Enright (2002, in Carson et al 2002) and probably the best example of this is **Charlotte** followed closely by **Peggy**. An early example from the research texts is **Jack**, an SME principal who has a partner and one main full time employee and two part-time packers who do the daily packing of the products to send out. It later becomes clearer that Jack cares a great deal about what his partner and his full time employee need in their working lives but especially what he wants from his full time employee and is therefore concerned that he has the ability to be much more than a robot in his work. This can be directly compared to critical theory in marketing (Morgan, 1996) and later in the interviews championed mostly by Charlotte**.**

Marketing realities

In chapter six I used **Dave**, an ETD participant with his '*yeah, good overview'* comment that seems to reflect the very simple discourse of the acceptance of some kind of marketing reality across all of the participants and could detect no attempt to subvert this notion. This is contrary to what I expected to find but made sense the more the interviews progressed and research texts developed. From the research texts, it is clear that some form of marketing is going on within the experience of each participant. During the interviews, in the first instance, the word marketing is not referred to unless as part of my dialogue or a response to its use. Rather, the narratives within the texts tell stories such as the power of big suppliers and the problems this can bring (**Gordon)**. As with Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001) networking outside the company appears strategic in nature and a proactive marketing tool (as with **Ann, Beth, Charlotte** and others) even if it is not described as such by all of the participants. The ‘Jackdaw University’ discourse about seeking knowledge or information of any sort that emerged from the research text of SME participant **Ann** (a persistent knowledge seeker) was to be seen later in the responses of most of the SME participants in terms of a relational approach to managing generally and marketing in particular.

Theme 2: Marketing is much more than the 4Ps

This theme is broader and more complex than the first and contains more discourses as a result. The literature is replete with the marketing science, art or something else debate that has a history that has seen orthodox marketing challenged by relational approaches. The dominant orthodox models and especially the marketing concept are central to this thesis, as is the transference of these to any context including SME contexts so I felt it natural to start the primary research with this in mind.

Marketing and science

So much has been written about marketing as a science (for example Hunt, 1986) or as art or aesthetics (for example Wright and Pickton, 1995, Belk, 1995, Prothero, 1995, Hetzel, 1997, Halliday, 1997, Copley, 1997, Belk, 1997). Orthodox marketing philosophy and its techniques have been transferred into any number of contexts (for example Smith and Thomas, 1981, Kent, 1986, McCart and Walsh, 1987, Mercer, 1993, Graham, 1994, Hooley, 1995, Strachan and hope, 1995, Lawther et al, 1997). However, the debate itself within marketing has come under some scrutiny for potentially being an academic indulgence. The idea of paradigms as propounded by Thomas Kuhn (Kuhn, 1962, 1970) has been at the bedrock of this debate but the debate predates the application of marketing to the paradigmatic approach by more than a decade (For example Converse, 1945, Alderson and Cox, 1948, Bartels, 1951, Hutchinson, 1952). The debate is ongoing with the occasional reference to paradigms and orientations but also in terms of value creation (for example Yaakobi et al, 1997) or market driven business and organisational performance through organisational culture (Pearson, 1993, Cravens et al, 1997, Harris and Ogbonna, 1999, Ellis, 2005). Developing a strategic approach is potentially problematic for any organisation and strategy for some is a learning process (for example Mintzberg, 1994b) while others ignore strategic approaches (for example Jain and Puili, 1987).

A number of discourses emerge in this theme that are to do with orthodox marketing tradition. **Tradition I (taking goods to market)** is really about orthodox marketing research. One SME participant in particular, **Charlotte**, stood out in terms of recognising the philosophical debate around marketing as science. Charlotte began rather paradoxically by apparently expressing orthodox (science) and later relational and critical (anti-science) sentiments in marketing. A number of ETD people such as **Sid** and **Dave** expressed themselves in a traditionalist, orthodox way regarding customer requirements. However, Charlotte mentioned the very orthodox marketing '*researching holes'* for pegs to fit. Later Charlotte moved on to relationships and being outward orientated, there being no point unless one gets it out there and sells it. At first though it is clear that Charlotte is one of a number of participants, especially those who are now business advisers, who in the first instance at least see marketing in terms of orthodoxy where the seeking and fulfilling of customer needs comes straight into consciousness. This can be seen directly in a number of narratives, for example Sid who is both traditional and relational. However while it is noted that Charlotte later talks of the '*science of marketing'* and appears at first to be on the same tack as Sid, as the interviews progress the two apparently take a different course. Charlotte later talks of networking and relationships but at an early point in the interview is rather orthodox in her marketing orientation. In **Tradition II (science stuff and fluffy stuff)** Charlotte talks about '*left brain'* marketing as science but '*fluffy stuff*' also i.e. the softer side of marketing that goes beyond the marketing mix and into networks/relationships/branding. Charlotte's stress on **theeee** statistical analysis of research fits in with her advocation of the need to measure outcomes but Charlotte believes in and prefers the softer side of marketing. **The perceived unwillingness to research the market** discourse comes from **Sean,** an ETD adviser who is critical of SMEs in terms of how they see marketing and not being able to distinguish between marketing and sales or marketing and marketing research. Sean supports the 4Ps approach and believes this to be useful to SMEs but in contrast to Charlotte's advocation of '*researching for holes',* Sean simply believes that very few SMEs will research their markets and have a reluctance to conduct marketing research. This is perhaps because they feel they know it all. Only enlightened business owner-managers do consider researching their markets. Sean thinks that most SMEs think in terms of marketing as sales in a simple way. The more enlightened ones are relational and engage with other businesses through networking in an organic way.

History and the imposition of marketing orthodoxy

The history of marketing is linked to the history of trade (Witzel, 2000) and society and the historical perspective (for example Jones, 2000) is supported in the literature, principally because it leads to a better understanding of the move from the science/art debate through orthodoxy and on to relational and critical perspectives. This includes interpretation and reflection (for example Hirchmann and Holbrook, 1982, Firat, 1986, Stern, 1990, Smith and Lux, 1993, Heeler and Chung, 2000). Orthodox marketing is both supported and criticised as a discipline that can be transported anywhere without critical analysis or concern (for example Kotler and Levy, 1971, Kotler and Andreasen, 1991, Lawther, 1997, Yaakobi et al, 1997). However, there are many detractors from this position (for example McCart and Walshe, 1987, Graham, 1994, Bennett, 1994, Strachan and Hope, 1995, Saker and Cave, 1995, Copley and Robson 1996). This debate often involves the 'marketing's second coming/new marketing' tags (for example Harris and Rees, 1995, who are pro-orthodoxy). However, marketing orthodoxy has prevailed even though research in the SME marketing field suggests that the BCG matrix and Ansoff's matrix (as examples of classic orthodox marketing models) have no real meaning in this context (for example in Morrison and Wensley, 1991). The 'plonking' (Copley, 1997) of the orthodox marketing discipline into non-business areas got underway by the end of the 1960s (for example Kotler and Levy, 1969, Luck, 1969, Ferber, 1970, Lavidge, 1970, Mindak and Bybee, 1971). At the same time the 'what is marketing' debate moved from science/art to definitional argument and ideas (Luck, 1972, Kotler, 1972, Bartels, 1974, Hunt, 1976).

In **Tradition III (the apparent anti-science of plonking the paradigm),** the difference between ETD and SME participants emerges. The transference comments I built into the probing had a resonance with the ETD participants. They knew what I was getting at immediately but it is here that a clear difference emerges between the SME principals and the ETD participants. One of the latter is **Dave**. Dave, like

Charles, sees the 4Ps as a useful starting point, something to '*hang their hat on framework*'. **Geoff** sees this in a rather similar fashion but as '*a training slip road*' but **Charlotte** is different in terms of being an SME principal first and foremost. However, they all get the transference idea. Like Charles, Dave is really cautionary in strict adherence to the marketing mix. While Charles talks about '*another story*', signifying a bespoke situation each time Dave makes a move toward innovation as the commodity that is likely to have value. Once the marketing mix elements are understood, innovation is the key to success for SMEs. In contrast, Charlotte appeared at first to be pro marketing as science but then appeared to contradict herself. Charlotte raised the issue of imposition of a kind of marketing on SMEs that might be inappropriate for the context. In this regard she is the opposite, apparently, of herself but certainly of Dave, Charles and Geoff who are all ETD participants and traditionalists – but with a relational attitude. Charlotte is self-critical for not applying marketing science more rigorously. She appeared to want a much bigger picture than either '*science*' or the '*fluffy stuff*' was offering independently.

The 4Ps as the quintessential orthodox marketing model

The 4Ps has been criticized for its damaging simplicity (Kent, 1986) and there is support for this model as applied to marketing (to explain what marketing is) but not marketing management i.e. it is of no practical use (Houston, Gassenheimer and Maskula, 1992). Many aspects of marketing as a discipline are problematic (Dobscha and Foxinan, 1998, Anderson and Taylor, 1995), there being inadequate theory (Gronroos, 1994) and a lack of integration with the exchange paradigm (Yudelson, 1999) or opposition to the exchange paradigm (Hyman, 2001). The 4Ps as the centre of modernist marketing includes things that can stand up in their own right (van Waterschoot and van den Bulte, 1992, Copley, 2004) and, interestingly, the 4P approach is incompatible with relationship marketing (Gronroos, 1994) despite there being a numerous efforts to marry the two (Constantinides, 2006). However, it is seemingly unfortunate that it appears at least that the strength of simplicity of the 4P model has strong allure still and Constantinides' own model of 4Ss, while including relational aspects, has the appearance at least of more P extensions as do others included in Constantinides' consideration.

It is perhaps inherently difficult for academics generally but also ETD people in particular to escape this allure of simplicity and plausibility. A number of my ETD participants revealed both their liking for the 4P model to be used in marketing training and development programmes but also their awareness of the somewhat absurd nature of 4P-type extensions. However, the SME principals do not appear to value it in the same way. For these participants the 4Ps and other phenomena merely exist and adding to the list of Ps will therefore have no impact. In **The absurdity and usefulness of more Ps** discourse **Geoff** talks of having come across10 Ps in terms of the usual orthodoxy things. Geoff sees the Ps as a gimmick to write books yet useful to get people seeing the difference between marketing and selling. This to Geoff is rather simple stuff, such as logos on vehicles, owner-managers having an eye on tight budgets and value for money. For Geoff the use of the 4P model in training does help the trainees move on through thought and discussion around the idea that without sales there is no business and marketing then would be pointless. Therefore, it is about things like pricing and profit and the model acts as a focus. For **Peggy** the APIC marketing planning model is central to what she does in training and Peggy is the ETD adviser (with involvement in an SME) who does a lot of training needs analysis. Peggy is also a sales results advocate who finds the Ps extension fashion amusing. Peggy is more into the use of SWOT, distinguishes between strategy and tactics, and adds communications to that which is important in marketing. Therefore, Peggy appears as a true modernist marketer yet sees the absurdity of the Ps focus. For Peggy sales and selling are paramount but Peggy still uses the 4Ps model in training.

Other orthodox marketing models

The literature of course also includes other modernist marketing models. The PLC, the Boston Matrix and Ansoff's Matrix all have their supporters and detractors. For example with the PLC, much of the criticism is levelled against its actual applicability in practice but not its plausibility (Dhalla and Yuspeth, 1976, Hooley, 1995, Mercer, 1993). Planning in marketing terms turns out to be problematic in itself (for example Mercer, 1993, Gronroos, 1994, Saren, 1994, Simkin, 2002). A key criticism is that using such approaches as the BCG Growth/Share Matrix serves only to make the teacher's life easier (Morrison and Wensley, 1991) and yet currently management consultancies operate in this fashion. There are academic supporters in the literature such as Watts, Cope and Hulme (1998) who even apply the Ansoff Matrix and Greiner's (1972) life cycle models to growth strategies of small food producers. This pulls in aspects of small firms' literature, for example Carson (1990) on marketing style and intuition.

It is in the area of the departure from the 4Ps and perhaps models such as SWOT that rejection of, confusion with or lack of awareness of modernist marketing models becomes apparent among some of the SME participants in particular. Both **Gordon** and **Naomi** see a struggle going on between small companies and much larger ones, hence the discourse of **David and Goliath**. For Gordon this is about the power of big suppliers. Gordon later in the interview says '*I have my own marketing concept'*, which is an attempt to subvert the orthodox teachings he has received on typical marketing for small firms-type training courses and seminars over the years. It is also a rejection of what Gordon sees as a misguided view on relationships between large and small firms. The absence of orthodox marketing models and concepts in the everyday business lives and language of some of the SME participants can be seen in the **Foreground and background** discourse**.** This included **Ann, Beth, Gordon** and **Naomi**. **Naomi** had no idea what the 4Ps-type jargon meant until it was explained but still saw marketing as being very important to the business, the task being to get people to buy into what the business is about. In **Tradition IV (communication, identity and branding but no 4Ps)** there is direct concern for the way communication works for SMEs as expressed by the SME participants. For example **Ann** recognises concepts such as the Marketing Concept from training courses she has attended but really only tolerates this. Maybe in the early days of the business she thought it was important but Ann's view on communication goes beyond the reductionist models of marketing orthodoxy. One could read this as the entire orthodox marketing spectrum in Ann's responses but when pressed a little further it is evident that Ann sees not the all-encompassing modernist marketing models but marketing in terms of impression or identity through communications and branding. **Beth** sees marketing in very basic terms and in particular, the image of the business, especially as a brand, and sees communications tools such as exhibitions, local advertising and networking as being important. Another of the SME principals, **Jack,** sees marketing as communication especially since this business is an Internet-based one. **Heather** is an ETD participant but also a business coach who also views marketing primarily in communications terms. Heather sees that transferring orthodox marketing models would be very problematic in the micro business/one-man-band/sole trader context that she works with as a business coach. **Peggy** too sees sales and communication as the essence of business and is firmly in her ETD role at the earlier part of the interview. Peggy sees '*theory*, frameworks, *systems,* as the ***'u n d e r p i n n i n g'*** and then '*practitioner skills that lie on top'* as the way marketing works but that sales and communications are stand alone subjects.

Opportunity and innovation in SME marketing

The literature suggests that marketing is seen by SMEs as peripheral; and only when things go wrong does it become a central concern (Hogarth-Scott, 1996). Perhaps this is because SMEs need more than an orthodox marketing approach to ETD. People, finance then marketing were the top three factors in Bradford University's research project on the nature of small business. In this project, there was evidence of identification of targets followed by a relationship marketing approach, then word of mouth advocacy. There were also negative associations with advertising and a suggestion that small businesses need clear understanding of basic principles and techniques not complex theories or sophisticated formalised procedures (Hogarth-Scott, 1996). There was a lack of formal planning but the recommendation is for small firm owner-managers to sit down and talk/think about where they are now (paradoxically considered to be the start of formal planning in traditional, orthodox marketing management) and to recognise the importance of talking. Therefore, interpersonal relationships are important ways of doing business. (Hogarth-Scott, 1996). This is supported by other research. For example, owner-managers become part of powerful networks and are opportunities-driven (Cromie 1998, McAuley, 2002) or the idea of the informal cabal where many issues are dealt with personally (Stokes 2002). There is an immense range of activities, shaped by characteristics of owner-manager, practiced for and by the business (Curran and Blackburn 2001). There is a cultural discourse in operation that emphasises the journey of mediocrity to success through the successful management of the business by the transforming metaphor of innovation and opportunity as an alternative to the 4Ps approach where marketing is recognised but not in a 4Ps way alone (Stokes, 1999).

It is clear to me from the research texts that just what is meant by the word marketing has to be explained, defined or qualified in some way to make any sense. For example in the **Opportunity - the small ship and the super tanker** discourse the advantages of being small and being able to quickly seize opportunities underscores the opportunities-driven nature of SMEs. Sid expresses this at length, the ex-SME principal turned ETD-type of adviser had started with a seemingly strict modernist, orthodox marketing outlook but when pressed a little further it was clear that Sid combined orthodoxy with entrepreneurial opportunism and curiously moved towards a more relational approach. It becomes apparent that Sid was talking about developing the business over time and it is building a reputation that matters. Sid then went on to extol the virtues of employing a marketing consultant to aid non-marketers i.e. buying expertise in and in a sense this is another expression of Sid's opportunism to facilitate more agility and consequently more opportunities. A slightly different discourse on opportunity can be seen in **Piggybacking and speed dating** where **Jane**, an ETD adviser, sees small businesses being able to seize the opportunity through bringing people together fast, or on the back of something else. This is a different kind of relational marketing that can also be slotted back into marketing orthodoxy as spotting gaps through a swot-type approach. For Jane it is about orthodox customer need and strategies (*academic things that come to* ***MIND***) but it is also about relationships and still further about using what one can find, such as piggybacking on the activities of others and more tactical promotion.

Theme 3: SME marketing ETD has 3 stakeholders with differing needs

This theme is about what matters to whom in terms of SME marketing ETD. As suggested in the last chapter the SME and ETD groups of participants have very different views in the area of ETD support and a number of discourses emerged from the research texts that expose a tension between ETD for qualifications and for business development. There are also issues around learning and how this is best accomplished.

Context matters

The literature suggests that the context is important to the kind of marketing practiced and has implications for ETD (Carson and Gilmore, 1999, Copley and Robson, 2001). The literature suggests that language (for example Enright, 2002) is different in the SME context to that of the dominant marketing orthodoxy and its corporate origins. However, it was recognised in the literature that different complex social behaviour and phenomena exist in different contexts, with the emergence of commonalities linked to personalities and characteristics in SMEs that can be built upon (Carson et al 2002). Owner-managers are interested in many facets of the business and business life and not fixated upon marketing problems as might be a big company marketing manager. They are interested in getting closer to the customer but actually appear to know how to do this (Pearson, 1993). Given that SMEs are characterised by resource shortage it is then not surprising to find a lack of expertise in all areas including marketing which can be haphazard, loose and unstructured (Carson, 1995). There may be a lack of interest in marketing on the part of SME owner-managers who see it as a con or inappropriate to them (Stokes, 2000). A limited customer base and dependency on the owner-manager's or a small number of director's competencies, lack of formal plans and difficulties in defending niches results in simple, non-sophisticated and informal marketing (Carson, 1995). Risk reduction and consolidation is strong given the long list of constraints on the SME owner-manager (Collinson and Shaw, 2001). The importance of SMEs to any economy is clear (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000) and ETD support is part of this (De Faoite et al, 2004) being needed as it is to enhance business effectiveness (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000).

The participants who are vocal in this area are the ETD people. From **the training provider** discourse, it is clear that **Sid, Dave, Sean** and **Charles** have similar outlooks. All are ETD participants (Sid is also a highly experienced SME participant) and focus on training and the importance of the training provider in delivering this in order to help businesses develop. Dave's is a more developmental approach through bringing people together and his disposition toward training and delivery. Dave moves from training to development of the individual but Dave's assumes that doing this means the business gets developed also (Sean and Charles see things in a similar way). This underlines the commonalities argument of Enright (2002). Sid is at this point in ETD mode and distinguishes between types of company, maintaining that some of the more technical or technology-based company principals are probably well-educated university types. Generally, education levels of owner managers have improved and for this reason, the relationship between trainers and trainee has changed. Sid thinks the importance of marketing is overlooked but for the business there is support and Sid believes with agencies, '*like Business Links'*, people are being developed in terms of, for example, marketing needs. As well as advocating a commonalities approach Sean sees the relationship between agency and SME as knowledge transfer in a BtoB context but that realism (*actually doing and being involved)* is important. Charles is also an advocate of commonalities and in effect bringing people together for to be trained but to recognise the differences also.

SME ETD and qualifications

Much activity is centred on competence-based qualifications promoted by the Government through the EDAs. Part of this is to get SME managers to buy in to the notion of lifelong learning culture but training is perceived by SMEs as beneficial but not necessarily linked to actual success (Massey, 2004). Development opportunities that go beyond mere training are even harder to obtain, especially with SMEs (Smith and Whittaker, 1998). Standards and MNVQs have seen some progress (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000) but this for Smith and Whittaker (1998) is generally slow. The history of MTD and ETD in the UK is very much about the tension between theory and academia and technical and managerial skills and competencies. It is also about the tension between training for employment and training for business development and the skills required to meet need (McBride, 1998). SME managers in particular do not demonstrate high levels of management skills and this has everything to do with SME survival rates (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999, Massey, 2004). The rationalisation of competence-based training into NVQs has not been without its problems with concerns over assessment-driven accreditation that lacks knowledge and understanding and other issues such as variation between assessment centres and assessment by simulation goes against the ethos of competencies for real tasks. The individual is accredited not the business, NVQs cannot be used to deal with soft skills such as creativity, intuition and sensitivity and overall NVQs are over-precise, jargon-ridden and they deal with the parts rather than the whole (Smith et al 1999). The problem has been the expected growth of management qualifications (Cannon and Taylor, 1994) and the lack of uptake of NVQs (Storey et al, 1997). Massey (2004) uses the word ‘flawed’ but there appears to be some correlation between MTD and the benefits for business success, although this does not necessarily mean the bottom line benefits (Smith et al, 1999). There is also evidence that bespoke approaches rather than formal ones might be preferable (De Faoite et al, 2004) as might informal delivery methods such as mentoring and networking. Still for Matlay (2004), there has been some joined up thinking in a long-term policy approach that attempts to deal with various trends while delivering training that meets short-term learning needs. Another key consideration is the way SMEs appear uninterested in accreditation at all, preferring on the job training to formal qualifications that is ad hoc and responsive to immediate and identifiable needs. The main barrier to training in SMEs is perceived inconvenient and unnecessary training (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000). However, SMEs might have a use for modern apprenticeships (Matlay, 2004).

There is nothing expressed in the research texts of this thesis directly about NVQs. The ETD participants did not take the opportunity to raise this issue at all and only two of the SME participants showed concern over academic and vocational matters. **Ann** is presented in chapter six as very much a pro skills advocate but in part at least this is because of her experience with people with degrees who cannot actually do the tasks asked of them. Ann understands the difference and relationship between personal and company training but also the limited resources of SMEs. Ann is passionate about this suggesting that constant supervision is needed as expressed in the **Anti-academia and pro-skills** discourse. In contrast, **Beth** is more pro-skills than anti-academia. For Beth the training issue is purely to do with coping with customers and technical skills that are needed can be bought in where necessary. The skills Beth is interested in are much more of the interpersonal variety. Beth provides an example of technical skills for creating floor plans that becomes a marketing tool, but this can be bought in. Beth has a DMS, which has nothing to do with the business, and she uses this to make her point about academia and to emphasise that the marketing taught in NBS is all about big companies, not small businesses.

SME development and training needs analysis

The literature deals with a number of problems regarding the development of SMEs and the development of managers in SMEs. As such it tackles issues such as the culture of the business (Smith and Whittaker, 1998), lack of management qualifications, the nature and degree of training and whether it is reactive or outgoing for development, chosen lifestyle and owner-managers too close to the operation of the business to be more outwardly developmental (Whittaker et al, 1997). The idea that competence-based training such as NVQ qualifications is the solution is questionable when it comes to the needs of SMEs (Smith and Whittaker, 1998, Loan-Clarke, 2000). There is clearly a much broader role for many fewer managers in SMEs and apart from cost, time, bureaucracy and relevance (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999) many other disadvantages have been illuminated in the literature such as jargon (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999). Maintaining commitment, the need for customised training, credibility of assessors (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000) leads to a ‘blind are leading the blind’ impression (Smith et al, 1999). Investing in staff can be seen as folly, mere technical and not entrepreneurial provision gives rise to a deficiency or gap and there is still the need to sell training (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999). Management is best developed on the job, delivery generally needs support in terms of time and training facilities, and there may be a role for learning agreements (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000). SMEs need to see the benefits of ETD and there appears to be a preference for more informal one-to-one experience (including within networking) than a course or programme that provides accreditation awards like NVQs (Devins and Johnson, 2003). SMEs are not homogenous therefore there is a need to deal with the diversity of the SME environment (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999). There is still a lack of skills and competencies, for example to analyse market conditions, because of this and therefore training and investment policy is flawed (Massey, 2004).

A key point to emerge in the primary research is the difference between the individual and the company in terms of training needs and business development. In the **Training needs analysis** discourse, **Peggy** (an ETD participant but also is a partner in a small firm) advocates this with an emphasis on the ***COMPANY*** and company **needs**. ***OCCASIONALLY*** this can be done in a generic way so that more than one company can take part in training and this, if it is appropriate, can presumably be more cost effective for all concerned. This is a sentiment shared by some of the other ETD participants, **Dave, Geoff** and **Jane** in particular. **Jane** goes a little further with this and is quite a traditional, orthodox marketing type seeing the need for basic marketing techniques but based on the needs of differing types of business. Jane perceives problems for people whose businesses have moved away from the start up stage to growth when taking time out (even if this is only two or three days) because this does not tally with what they need and can accommodate. Jane seems to be indicating that training courses are fine for start up but something else is needed in terms of delivery beyond that. For **Geoff** training has to be planned and has to meet real issues that will help the business or the individual while **Heather**, an ETD advisor who has her own business, is simply interested in current issues and is aware of limited resources but translates this into the need to be innovative in terms of training input.

Experiential development

This is dealt with in more detail in the theme 4 below, in terms of experiential learning, but is included here because there is a call in this study for simplicity and clarity for the sake of the development of the trainee. There is concern in the literature that narrow experiential 'learn by doing' attitudes may prevail and evidence that suggests that senior managers learn accidentally through informal interaction, development coming through the 'school of hard knocks'. There is support for more formal approaches to learning and development to be integrated with the more informal ones but the concern is that senior managers are less likely to support training and development for managers and staff even though they might recognise the need for training and development (Smith and Whittaker, 1998).

With the **Experiential learning of theory through practice and simplicity for clarity** discourse, **Charlotte** sees beyond skills and training and expresses a 'bigger picture' worldview in a succinct manner. Charlotte is here arguing for people development in order to develop the business. The emphasis placed by Charlotte on the stretching of **s p e c i a l i s m s** is an indication of her belief that within specialisms such as marketing, jargon is a potential barrier to development. With the emphasis on **s i m p l i f y i n g** this is Charlotte's solution. This does not deny theory. Theory is okay as long as it is meaningful to practice and business requires practical outcomes to be successful, as emphasised by the words ***TAKE UP*** and ***BUY IN*** meaning that people will welcome the training and development**.**

Delivering marketing ETD to SMEs through social interaction

Social interaction is one of Carson and Gilmore's (1999) three marketing fundamentals in the form of network marketing that allows the firm to be viewed within its social context. Both traditional marketing and traditional entrepreneurship have neglected this and its success is dependent upon the skills/competencies of the individual that are developed in part by networking. Networking is an end in itself (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). If owner-managers prefer informal networking and interactive marketing methods then they will welcome this as part of ETD (Stokes, 1999). Entrepreneurs can give something back by becoming involved with networks or as guest speakers (Williams and Turnbull, 1999). Pressure on resources makes directed private study an attractive proposition in any educational setting but this is not without its detractors. Internet education has so far been undirected but this is changing with changes to the Internet. Clearly, the use of web sites for delivery of course material is well under way. Interconnectivity to banks of educational material for learning support is a key issue (Maclaran and Catterall, 1999). However, within the context of the SME learner, learning objectives and pedagogical considerations are different from those involving the mainstream student. The SME manager as learner, more than most, is the opposite of the passive learner of the past. The social aspect of learning is clearly important to SMEs. It is perhaps not too surprising that SMEs have been slow to take up the Internet as a learning tool but there is the likelihood that the Internet is used to build contacts and in that sense, it is part of networking and of their business effort generally (Blackburn and Athayde, 2000).

There is much in this study on relationships and this is dealt with in detail in theme 6. However, one discourse in particular has resonance here. An advocate of training in the marketing area, especially to network, is **Jack**, another of the SME principals who, in the **Training to network and networking through development events** discourse, expressed interested in all three of the suggested stakeholders' needs and is certainly interest in training to develop – if it has immediate relevancy. Training staff to know how to network, which would help the business, is one such scenario. Gaining experience through networking strikes a chord with **Naomi** who sees a lot of good coming out of meeting other business types. I met Naomi at a business club-type event with a guest speaker and an unusual but very effective format. Naomi was impressed with this, but not the buffet, or the facility but never the less had felt it worthwhile in helping to network as well as get something from the event. Naomi was still thinking about the event we had met at and while she thought that an evening course might suit them, her mind was still on the business club event and meeting business people in that way.

Theme 4: Basic functional and technical skills are not enough

This theme considers the difference between skills levels from basic technical skills through to more complex managerial and entrepreneurial skills development. Whether skills should be developed or bought is an integral part of this equation.

Thinking critically

The size of the business matters when considering types of skills required (Firat et al, 1995, Stokes, 1997, 1999, Carson and Gilmore, 1999). Entrepreneurial and opportunities (not customer needs) driven owner-managers will have intrinsically different motivations than the more extrinsic motivations of large firm managers and their smaller firm counterparts (Williams and Turnbull, 1999) and this would effect the way they deal with strategy and planning issues (Copley, 1998, Carson, 1995). The entrepreneur might move toward an administrative orientation as the business develops (Birley and Gibb, 1984) and this would necessarily affect skills needs perceptions. Skills require detailed knowledge but background knowledge is a prerequisite for thinking critically and imaginatively. Transferable personal skills allow knowledge and understanding to be used effectively and appropriately at work with other people. Barriers exist to achieving critical thinking (Entwistle, 1984). The learning process involves passive and active learning. Conditioning and trait modification, information transfer and cognitive and information processing lead to new ideas and problem solving by insight and understanding which in turn involves pre-existing knowledge and conceptions, motivation, critical thinking, and memory (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983, Entwistle, 1984, Nisbet and Shucksmith, 1984, Kolb, 1985, Thorpe and Jones, 1985). Seeking alternative modes of thought and behaviour from which a standpoint is created through thinking critically is undermined by the demand for a vocational orientation in curriculum design demanded by students and employers (Brennan, 2000). The exclusion or even derision of social science inputs in favour of the provision of preparation for technical skills misses the opportunity to incorporate critical reflection. In marketing education, generally there has been an over-emphasis on practice and a lack of critical approaches to marketing theory that can then be linked to marketing practice. What is needed is more rigor accompanied by relevance rather than treating the student or trainee as 'the customer' and providing simplistic frameworks (Burton, 2005). Critical marketing studies should be included in the curriculum (Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 1999). Because thinking critically reflects the real life working situations managers are in there is a need to evaluate existing theory critically to help managers create novel solutions (Brownlie, 1997). There is, therefore, space for gender, ecology, race, politics, morality, ethics and other social issues on the marketing curriculum. This would require critical reflection where experiences are thought about in the wider social contexts (Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 1999).

In this research, there is a call for people to be more than robots. The discourse **Being able to think is critical but this is not necessarily critical thinking** reveals the more limited expectations of some of the participants of this study. In chapter six, **Ann** was presented as the SME principal interested in employees who are '***WIDE EYED***'. Ann is not purely a basic skills advocate. Ann wants people who are able to grab a concept, run with, and be excited about it. Ann's business is steeped in ethical issues and Ann sees ethical relationships at the core of marketing for her business. **Jack** in contrast is an SME principal who wants more from his employees than mere mechanical performance, he wants people to be able to think and analyse for themselves. However, Jack only goes so far with this. I asked about issues such as sexual politics and ethics but Jack rejected this for the practical '….n*o, no I wouldn't think so at all… just come in and get on with it'*. Jack is highly pragmatic and can see the need for people to think beyond the immediate task in hand. **Sid**, now an ETD adviser but with considerable experience of running SMEs is concerned with narrowness and it being part '*of the reason for subject areas, like marketing, being sort of diluted'*. For Sid '*broadening of the scope of subject area'* is the way and that people start and run businesses because they are not *'narrow-minded techies'*. Similarly, **Peggy,** an ETD adviser but also partner in her own business goes well beyond the basics. Peggy is emphatic about this. However, an emphasis is put on competency levels and the idea that technical knowledge, more than knowledge transfer is '***NEEDED'***. **Heather** is also both an ETD adviser and a business coach and as such has a lot of self-belief that is needed to bring more out of people. Heather appreciates basic skills that are an *'almost automated'* approach to management but Heather helps people develop '*new skills, new needs and new ways of doing things'*. Heather wants people to manage better through '*reinforced skills'* and believes in *'helping people to be the people they can be'* as a business coach. This kind of delivery is discussed in theme 9 at the end of this chapter. **Charles** is an ETD participant who believes in thinking carefully, critically, and not too broadly. As I discuss narrowness, Charles understands and agrees throughout my talking and probing. Paradoxically Charles at first says that it might not pay to think too broadly but he is talking about his own role operating *'within the guidelines'*. Later he advocates *'thinking out of the box and thinking from top down'*.

Experiential and social learning and critical reflection

Experiential learning (Kolb and Fry, 1975, Kolb, 1984) is linked to motivation (Entwistle, 1984, Wittrock 1986) and can have an effect on entrepreneurial or ordinary small business creation (Cachon, 1987, Halliday, 1987). The life-long learning and education of Knowles (1980), sees adults engaging in a process of continuing self-development. Linking real life situations or prior theoretical material to visualise theoretical information is at the heart of this process (McGuigan and Weil, 2007). Experiential Learning involves concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Typically, solutions are arrived at through tutor facilitation and skills are developed in this way (McGuigan and Weil, 2007). Experiential Learning helps acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting but can also involve a direct encounter with the phenomena being studied i.e. direct participation in the events of life, sponsored by people themselves. Learning styles can be based around the model that sees learning styles shaped by social, educational and organisational socialisation from school to early adult work and personal experience and integration ((Honey and Mumford, 1982, Kolb, 1984). Learning is a holistic process within Kolb's learning framework where there are transactions between individuals and the environment and knowledge is created and built upon (McGuigan and Weil, 2007). Kolb has also been integrated with other models (for example Thorpe and Jones, 1985) and it is a useful tool in helping learners to learn and apply skills (Thorpe and Jones, 1985, Nisbet and Shucksmith, 1984, Copley, 1989).

An alternative to Kolb, the critical reflection model, encourages students to debate their experiences within larger social systems (Catterall, Maclaran and Stevens, 1999). This is similar to the social and conversational model of experiential learning that sees learning and influence are part of an ongoing negotiated process and challenges the view that the learner learns in isolation, thoughts having real social character (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004). Networks are clearly important for, amongst other things, problem solving, knowledge development and knowledge transfer (Deacons and Wyper, 2006). Learning is therefore a process of co-participation, depends on socio-cultural and historical factors, and is part of a social constructionist and activity theory perspective and in this sense, it is a departure from the Kolb approach and involves critical learning events and the social characteristics of entrepreneurial learning (Cope, 2005). Ordinary SME owner-managers can learn from the behaviours of entrepreneurs. Higher level learning can be achieved through critical learning events and the 'school of hard knocks' combined with lower level, routinised, adaptive learning provide both a 'thinker and doer' learning journey (Cope, 2005). Critical reflection can be added to Kolb's model resulting in critically reflective practice moving marketing forward as a discipline.

Social learning through networking is dealt with in theme 6. Experiential learning emerges in the **Experiential learning is key to skills training success** discourse. **Ann** is particularly vocal in this area. The word ***IMAGINE*** is emphasised and said deliberately loudly. Thinking critically is fundamental to what the company does anyway, so Ann is tuned in to this but believes in experiential learning and '*being* *able to think, to question, to challenge and to* ***IMAGINE****. It is the 'what if' world'.* Similarly **Charlotte** is an SME principal but also a business adviser who picks up the debate immediately so that when I ask about *'the incorporation of a critical reflection'* and *of 'narrow vocationalism'* I am interrupted with a '*Yes, no I've got you, yep ……Thinking skills?'* and I agree. Charlotte is very much in favour of experiential learning because she finds it *'very, very difficult to draw…emm…theory from books because when my brain works it's a much, a much more experiential'* Charlotte believes in being '*touchy-feely, creative, than process-driven'.* A team needs '***BALANCE'*** and '*high degree of …skills, a highly experientially driven …emm…and a critical, critical effect in the leaders'* which a lot of small companies do not have. What you have is people who have to do a lot of things '*there are some people who just want to do a job and they don't want to think…and what they just need is to have the skills to do the job* ***FULL STOP'.*** The emphasis on ***BALANCE*** in terms of teamwork and the emphatic ***FULL STOP*** on skills is typical of Charlotte.

I emphasise to **Sean** as an ETD participant that the trend towards skills expectations and the danger of being too narrow. Sean is also an advocate of some form of experiential learning, or at least marrying theory and practice and recognises the danger of a kind of pendulum effect that rocks the boat, as illustrated with the loudness of '***SKILLS, SURPRISE SURPRISE'***. Sean is concerned about the skills gap that has been created by the swinging between education and training approaches and is keen on balance and the '*practiced professional person'.* **Peggy** is an advocate of going beyond the basics. She is also goes on to talk about one of her colleagues and herself as being CIM qualified but from very different backgrounds. Marketing for her colleague '*is a product experience…… but we both come at it from very, very different backgrounds and it's, it's how our brains work, how our brains process information. And I will only take on board marketing, sales, communication information if its* ***people based*** *and it's experiential'.*

Skills can be bought in

There are limits to resources in SMEs. ETD programmes have to be seen to be cost-effective if SMEs are to be helped to be adaptive. To this end, programmes should facilitate the grafting on of managerial skills for development as well as providing skills to fill administrative gaps (Copley, 1989). Moreover, the entrepreneurial, managerial and technical-functional roles that the key SME manager must assume for managerial effectiveness requires varied skills. Thus, a fusion of varying types of skills or competencies across a 'spectrum' are necessary but not always possible within one individual. The manager has to be capable of adaptation of marketing techniques and seem to indicate that this is part of overall skills development (Carson and Gilmore, 1999).

In the **Skills are important but can be bought** discourse **Beth** is the small business partner in a kitchens and bathrooms business who felt skills to be important but was unconcerned about narrow vocationalism or that people need a more critical and reflexive. Beth simply says knowledge of the industry and products and knowing your market is what counts. Beth is not interested in training courses but agrees that '*interpersonal skills'* are important to the business. If Beth needs the skills she'll buy them in '*So we would actually go to somebody who was an expert……We wouldn't necessarily go and join a course'.* I still try to get Beth to consider narrowness but get nowhere. For Beth it is straightforward. If they can do it themselves they will. If they cannot they would buy it in. Beth uses the example of advertising copy *' we'd look at what was being put into the advert…what we need…the basic, essential things. We wouldn't have emm…anything…it would be telling a story…it would be telling people…what we did and what we would want the information that they needed to know'.* **Jane** is an ETD participant who, paradoxically, believes many training packages could do with losing '*some of the important theoretical stuff*'. Jane advises new businesses and is an advocate of skills development and feels businesses have to either develop what they need or '*look at a match…collaborations or strategic alliances which will help* ***YOU.*** *Almost buy in the skills'.* Unlike Beth, Jane does advocate training but the emphasis is clearly on doing. Jane uses the example of arts and craft-type people who often do not have the aptitude to, for example, sell things and may, for this reason, be better off buying in this function. Like Jane, **Dave** is an ETD participant who believes in training but sees nothing wrong with doing both training if it is appropriate and bringing in a consultant to solve problems for the business. Dave at first interprets my use of the word skills in a technical way as in '*Writing a press release'.* I explain about reflexivity and narrow vocationalism and Dave agrees and suggests things are moving from mere training for basic skills to ‘*learning environments’*. Dave understands this in terms of the owner manager make up, background and vision. The kind of business that is going for growth will recognise deficiencies and be ‘*willing to bring in the expertise…… assessing your strengths and weaknesses. We’re all supposed to be good risk assessors…em…identifying what your problem areas are and also obviously from that it becomes an organisational/cultural issue’.*

Theme 5: SME marketing curriculum needs horses for courses

Theme 5 comes from exploration of what SME marketing might look like in a curriculum context from the science-based modernist derivative models through to the notion that marketing can be something other than science.

Keep the SME marketing curriculum basic and simple

Marketing has a vain obsession with mechanistic approaches and beliefs in laws (O’Shaughnessy, 1995). Academics have been trying to elevate their own status by suggesting marketing should follow some sort of scientific code (Brown, 1995). However others have since levelled the same charge at Brown, for example Morgan (1996) who see postmodern marketing going nowhere and Brown himself (Brown, 2000) admitting that postmodern marketing has perhaps become a brand in itself with academics seeing an opportunity through associating themselves with it and its apparent success. Marketing simply cannot live up to the hypothetico-deductive logic of science. Marketing cannot be separated from commerce and the coming together of science, technology and business can be seen as part of an organisational whole in a socio-cultural environment (McDonagh, 1995). If the social sciences have still unsolved problems of methodology and measurement (O’Shaughnessy, 1995) then surely marketing will also. The systems dynamics paradigm used in the study of social systems may be of value (Meadows and Robinson, 1985, Copley and Wilkinson, 1998) and other pseudo-scientific tools such as profiling are clearly being used, rather than dwelling on a positivistic picture. Audience and market data can be useful in certain contexts such as the arts (Copley and Robson, 1996).

A strictly orthodox marketing curriculum for SMEs is highly unlikely. The nearest thing in this study that we get to marketing science is the **Keeping it basic and simple** discourse where **Beth** is puzzled when asked about the more critical ideas regarding content of training or books. I have to explain that things like ethics or gender might play a role but Beth saw this in simple, practical terms. **Charles** on the ETD side also saw this in basic terms. For Charles the scope of the training area can include things like ethics but feels there is a need to '*make them as commercial as possible'* and uses the example of '*ethical sponsorships of local school for disabled children'* as an opportunity so that Charles misunderstood my basic premise and talked in fairly basic, practical terms. When pressed Charles stuck to the very basics with sales and sales promotion as examples of building blocks. This is the usual stuff of orthodoxy but not a 'marketing is science' attitude. **Geoff's** response was used in the last chapter to illustrate a basic attitude to marketing. Geoff concedes that as a business grows there may be a requirement for the principal to become a thinker as well as a doer so that Geoff advocated a broader approach to incorporate things other than marketing but was non-specific.

Marketing as art

The marketing as art route appears to offer very little, despite some support for consideration of literary discourses that might provide insights into consumer behaviour (Copley, 1997), work on photography offering analysis that might contribute toward marketing strategy (Wright and Pickton, 1995) and others point to film (Chapman and O'Reilly, 1995) and hyperreality (Belk, 1995). The same criticism as made above of imposing a 4P approach on arts marketing would also apply here and the advocation of some sort of route of creativity seem to fall short of anything concrete other than 'thinking creatively'. Apart from **Naomi** learning from what is going on around her (the **foreground and background** discourse**),** there is nothing of any substance that emerges from the research texts in this study.

Marketing as practice

The integrated, holistic approach that sees marketing as a broad church or a wider context that includes creative thinking (Murray and O'Driscoll, 1995) can meet the changes that marketing requires. An interactive perspective where the concern is with the business as a whole rather than discrete functions/difficulties (Tait, 1988) and the social development process as a management framework (Gibb, 1983) suggest different programmes at different stages of the business life cycle and therefore the need for different inputs. Marketing as practice offers reconciliation between theory and practice by developing a mix that is more flexible and does not adhere to the consumer focus approach (Carson, Gilmore and Maclaran, 1995). The expectations of practitioners' views are important (Copley and Robson, 2001) and tangible and broader knowledge is key to problem solving (Chaston, 2004). This links in with the theory/practice relationship where knowledge helps develop theory that feeds in to strategy and tactics and the organisation's strategic vision (Hackley, 1999). Small firms' managers do not value marketing planning. Marketing decision-making is simplistic, haphazard, spontaneous, and intuitive. They use marketing for managing problems but do not treat marketing in the same way as do education and training providers. There is the potential for product orientation and innovation and there is a tendency toward more specific elements of the marketing mix such as word-of-mouth (Carson and Gilmore, 1999). In terms of the SME marketing curriculum there is as need to consider what is core and what is peripheral or surface (Copley, 2000). The Internet for example has been hailed as important to performance enhancement (Hamill, 1997, Gul and Whitelock, 1999, Ashill and Jobber, 1999). However, the problems for the small business decision-maker as opposed to the specialist in the larger company are compounded because of the constraints on resources (Stokes, 1999).

There are myriad ideas that emerge in this study as to what SME marketing should be. In the **Supporting the business by understanding culture and ethics and things other than the basics** discourse **Ann's** responses were used to illustrate the importance of ethics because of the very nature of her business and the international perspective she has. Ann also revealed some modernist marketing knowledge with her '*Segmentation you know is very important isn't it in terms of where you fit'*. **Charlotte** said without hesitation that *'It's **MUCH,** much more important'* to have more than the narrow functional focus. Charlotte highlights a fundamental difference between large and small companies in terms of *'the greasy pole **STUFF'*** of big companies and then talks of visibility and the pressures of running a small company. Charlotte here is moving towards a relationship stance whereas **Jack** raised this much earlier and this can be seen throughout Jack's research text. In the **Changing relationships** discourse Jack homes in on the importance of relationships to his business but also that relationships are not static by using a salesman example to illustrate why things being a '*little bit cheaper'* would not tempt Jack to buy from him because he did not get on with the salesman. With **Creativity and innovation in delivery, Dave** was the only participant to introduce delivery and we talked about, for example, tailored or off-the-peg offerings, days and half days. This appeared to bore him, or perhaps be too obvious but the interesting comment comes around putting innovation into the equation rather than '*bog standard training needs analysis'*. My probing revealed Dave interested in creativity and innovation in training terms in order to make a difference in delivery and in promoting the idea of creative solutions. Dave differentiates between training for companies and training for individuals and '*if it's training for a company…it's…it's hopefully the trainers who come up with a package that meets the vision of the company…em…and how you can sort of facilitate and promote that vision'*. **Sean** provided the substance of **Necessary evil enforcement and enlightenment**. For Sean it is a question of taking the traditional marketing mix but matching this with '*the inherent makeup of the company'* where in BtoB markets especially it is the targeting of partnerships that needs to be understood. Sean believes in enforcement to achieve development i.e. to convey the benefits of doing all that is necessary to all concerned. This is good internal management and governance.

In the **Supporting the business by understanding culture and ethics and things other than the basics** discourse a number of the ETD participants were vocal. **Peggy** found my line of questioning at this point obvious with a '***COURSE'*** response (meaning of course) adding that '*the very inherent nature that people do marketing (laughs loudly)…we're not robots'*. Peggy is very traditional when it comes to training and is a believer in orthodox marketing planning and the marketing mix but maintains that *'you must have that human element'*, especially in business-to-business settings. I ask **Jane** about inputs and putting in more than marketing. Jane does not think that what her organisation does is sophisticated. For Jane the idea of '***ETHICS'*** is an interesting one and there is a lot of play on the idea of having something like a kite mark to say *'you know, we, we believe in these principles'*. Ideas around fair trade and local procurement to encourage a multiplier effect in the local economy are of interest. Jane thinks that courses that included these kinds of inputs would be '*really* ***welcome'.*** Jane also mentions '*equal opportunities …or environmental standards'* . I give Jane some idea of typical inputs but Jane stays with these other kinds of inputs, which she thinks these have been '*done to a **DEATH**'* and that *'people are actually switched off'* by it but thinks this could be '*really exciting stuff that can be done around…turning equal opportunities on it's head almost'*. Jane also has a raft of ideas around segmentation and targeting of ethnic minorities, the gay economy and thinks that *'diversity pays'*. Jane thinks '*there's some refreshing stuff to be had'* from repackaging and marketing training inputs. **Heather** is specific on what she would propose and this is in line with her work as a personal business coach, her response being a focus on the development of the individual rather than being subject specific.

Theme 6: SME marketing is infused with relational perspectives

This theme comes from probing around aspects of relationships. It highlights a fundamental difference in the way SME and ETD participants see marketing. Generally speaking, the former do not consider the 4P modernist approach to be at the centre of what they do. Their perspectives are much more relational and to an extent critical. The ETD participants on the other hand are much more relational in their approaches but still value the modernist models such as the 4Ps as useful ETD tools. There is no doubt, however, that in the SME-land of the participants of this study there are strong linkages with relational issues and approaches.

Relationships are obvious and crucial

In the literature opinion on customer relationship management (CRM) and relationship marketing is varied. McDonald (2001) maintains that neither is new but there is much support for this kind of approach to marketing (for example Piercy, 1999, Gronroos, 1994a, Stone, Morgan and Hunt, 1994, Woodcock and Wilson, 1996). Relationship marketing came to the fore in the 1990s according to Shrivastava and Kale (2003) but who question how much is rhetoric and how much is reality. For Payne (2000) there are customer markets but also internal, referral, influencer, recruitment and supplier and alliance markets. Sharma and Sheth (1997) draw up a similar list. For some, internal marketing is integral to relationship marketing (for example Buttle, 1996, Gronroos, 1990). Buttle (1996) adds supportive culture, understanding customer expectations and use of sophisticated databases, this latter point being highlighted by Coviello, Brodie and Munro (2000). Buttle (1996) highlights incentives and rewards where sales people become relationship people. Relationships can, by definition, be found in all exchanges but value creation appears to be a key bonus in providing sustainable competitive advantage. This involves supplier partnering, alliance partnering and customer partnering, these should be long term in orientation, and there is a shift from exchange to transaction (Sharma and Sheth, 1997).

The participants in this study by and large see marketing as being about relationships in one way or another, relational approaches taking many forms. In the **Relationships are crucial** discourse **Ann** is used as an example because the ethical base to her business makes relationships with others, suppliers as well as customers, crucial because of the 'fit' necessary for that base. We discussed relational approaches in terms of all 'stakeholders' and Ann said that *'marketing was at the core'* but thought there to be '*a marketing/relationship …thing there'* and there is a specific reference to relationships with suppliers where '*we wouldn't do something like……have pieces of ivory for example'*. This goes '*across the board'* and when I ask what she would like these relationships to be Ann shows concern about respect and trust and honesty that employees must have since they '*act as consultants'* and *'go out and advise customers and potential customers'*. This is textbook relationship marketing for a business, despite being small and in reality embryonic but one which has vision involving '*effective learning environments'* for young children that sees '*mutual respect and trust'* as central with '*an open, honest relationship'* where dialogue is essential to finding solutions to problems. **Charlotte** on one level too sees relationships as central and appears to revel in the idea that technology has not taken over, having been involved with the dot com explosion at the end of the millennium and beginning of the 'noughties'. Charlotte saw this as '*bollocks'* because of relationships but this is part of Charlotte's importance of people and as such is part of broader management that includes critical thinking and reflection. In terms of marketing though, choices are made on relationship bases since people *'don't just choose on the 4Ps'* but rather on relationships they have with key people in other organisations, this being a classical relationship marketing statement to make. In diagrammatically opposing fashion to **Gordon** (another of the SME principals who saw relationships in a different way but who was very definite about the 4Ps approach being simply background until an aspect such as pricing becomes crucial) Charlotte thinks that *'you don't buy just on price'* because for Charlotte's business it is '*not about …one-off sales, which is bloody hard'.* It is really about a philosophy where you have relationships with customers and people who work for you. It is about '*building a place in the community'* not just making money and even for bigger businesses, it is about '*social responsibility'.* For Charlotte '*it makes better sense to **doooo**'* and puts this down to her family upbringing and has a strong sense of the '*much **BIGGER** area of relationships'*. Charlotte believes in the '*strategic importance of relationships'* and it is Charlotte who believes there is a gender difference where she '*thinks the thinking is different'.* To **Sean** relationships are '*Paramount'.* Sean is an ETD participant who was an advocate of what he earlier called '*enlightened SMEs'*. Sean, like Charlotte, believed in *'striking partnerships and relationships'* which are '*the most influential part of any development'* and for Sean it is '*all encompassing'.*

In **Relationships and cobbler's shoes again, Peggy** (an ETD marketing adviser but also involved in a small firm) expresses the attitude that one can be so busy looking after external things that this tends to take precedent over internal things (cobbler's shoes). This is the equivalence of the mechanics car where the mechanic is so busy looking after other people's cars his own is a wreck. Still Peggy is expressing a central role for relationships in management and in marketing management in particular. Peggy's organisation has a customer relationship management (CRM) system anyway and '*it's account management and it's long term relationships'.* Peggy has training needs analysis as central to her job and she explains the length she will go to service the client and provide added value. If the client needs advice on Timbuktu Peggy will go '***find'*** the expert and his *'best mate who is the expert on my client's product in Timbuktu and what network is there for him'.* Peggy's organisation has relationships also and she talks about her staff and *'who's who in the zoo'* as far as '*stresses, pressures, motivations, ticky boxes, up times, down times, their expectations'.* Internal workings are difficult and it's '*Very much harder to get it from one department to another department',* which is a '*nightmare'* with '*horrendous em internal communications'.* The problem as Peggy sees it is all of the relationships (including partnerships with other agencies, Government projects and the like) that must be maintained at the expense of improvements internally so that the relationship strategy that *'is developed with our partners…which is stronger than the four departments have with each other'*.

The problems with relationships

Not all commentary in the literature is positive on relationships and relationship marketing, although most appears to be. There is a reluctance to transfer ideas from BtoB/services relationship marketing to consumer contexts. Relationships can be one-sided or not mutually beneficial and lack exit strategies (Shrivastava and Kale, 2003) and doing it in the first place can be irrational because it reduces choice (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). Not all commentators accept the relationship paradigm. For Palmer (2005) the paradigm shift from orthodox marketing to relationship marketing has not yet been demonstrated and there is a lack of empirical work to show this and more is needed to understand the workings of power, trust and commitment. For some, before relationship marketing strategy can be developed, segmentation and customers have to be understood (Piercy, 1999, Barnes, 1995). However, rather than a mantra of 'research the market,' one of 'research relationships' is advocated (Piercy, 1999). This might be a natural thing to do for SMEs where much has been learned about relationships (Barnes, 1995). Here the special status of principals, commitment, trust, power symmetry and personal interaction are essential to the working of relationships (Newman et al, 2004).

The participants in this study provided no noticeable challenge to the usefulness of incorporating relational approaches to marketing. What is a little surprising is the lack of concern for exit strategies. The only participant to come close to this kind of concern was **Gordon** as discussed in **theme 2 discourse 2a (David and Goliath)** where Gordon is concerned about the power of big suppliers and the imbalanced relationship that SMEs like his own might have with them. **Sean** is the only participant to comment explicitly on researching the market as discussed earlier in **theme 2 discourse 2i (The perceived unwillingness to research the market).** This hides the underlying feeling that small business people inherently know their business and their markets and given the importance attached to relationships and networking in this study, researching relationships rather than the market per se would make a lot of sense.

Relationship marketing is cost-efficient

The notion that SMEs on tight budgets should engage in relationship marketing is a natural one to assume. Retaining customers is problematic for SMEs (Fournier et al, 1998) but to win and keep them through building relationships is cost-effective (Buttle, 1996) and means greater profits (Reicher and Sasser (1990). Customer retention can be achieved through personal contact networks (Coviello and Munro, 1995) whether informal or formal (Filiatrault and Lapierre, 1997). Interpersonal contact with primary customers is the norm (Orr, 1995). Word of mouth is key, especially with manufacturing SMEs, advertising as a means of communication being generally seen in a negative light i.e. ineffective and a waste of money (Hogarth-Scott, Watson and Wilson, 1996).

These ideas are most definitely reflected in the **Relationships are obvious and inevitable** discourse especially in the response from **Beth** who is basic and has a simple view regarding customer relationships. Beth is interested in '*repeated business'* and explains how she keeps customers (and customers of customers) sweet when things go wrong. This is still '*developing the relationship'* with simple measures and touches. **Jack** also agrees that relationships are important. From his reaction, I think Jack found this line of questioning banal and stating the obvious. Jack sees the 4Ps as central to the business but not marketing with a '*relationship marketing for me is the most important'* response**.** For Jack and Beth this is everyday stuff.

The management of relationships

Trust, commitment and loyalty (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) appears to remain central to relationship marketing but other relationship marketing associated research has gone on, for example horizontal and vertical trade relationships is reported by De Wulf and Odekerken-Schroder (2001), relationship quality (Crosby, Evans and Cowles, 1990), and co-marketing alliances (Bucklin and Sengupta, 1993). Some concern is expressed for the relationship marketing principles developed in BtoB marketing being transferred to consumer markets (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Relationship friendliness is a concern where some situations are more friendly than others (De Wulf and Odekerken-Schroder, 2001). For Harden (2004) key account management is central and this is perhaps more relevant to SMEs while Harker and Egan (2006) point to the mixing of relationship marketing and the 4Ps. This has led to an extension of the 4Ps approach where such additions are futile as is the search for marketing laws, regularities and predictability. Network theory may prove more meaningful in BtoB rather than consumer exchanges and in rapidly changing environments relationships with a host of different organisations are seen as essential for survival (Stokes, 1999, Carson et al, 1995). Therefore, customer intimacy should be sought (Rao and Perry, 2002) but in a consistent manner and utilising database technology (Dean et al, 1997, Coviello, 2000) where appropriate since not all customers will be worth retaining (Buttle, 1996) and not all customers would want to be on a database (Gabarino and Johnson, 1999).

Extensions to the 4Ps was dealt with in **theme 2/discourse 2h (The absurdity and the usefulness of more and more Ps)**. Networking is a constant across the research texts. Despite being keen on the 4Ps and other orthodox marketing models and concepts for training purposes, ETD participants like **Sid, Dave, Geoff** and **Charles,** find the idea of relationship marketing quite a natural thing as reflected in the **Relationships are obvious and inevitable** discourse. As **Geoff** says '*You could see it happening all around you'* and his example of his local Woolworth's and Spar shop is a useful one in pointing out how not to do relationship marketing. Geoff is '*very in to networking now'* and he feels it is a '*great way for people to expand their horizons, not necessarily just to get business'*. In this sense Geoff begins to move away from the *'it's obvious'* towards networking where '*you can see people actually develop and you can see their confidence grow'* and they '*just absorb it without consciously thinking about it'*. From the texts, it can be seen that the likes of Sid, Dave, Geoff and Charles all have a straightforward outlook on relationships and all are orthodox in their approach to marketing and as such have no problem with either modernist or relational camps individually or as a mixed approach. The literature would suggest however that personal relationships and quality of service are deemed more important than the 4Ps and other traditional approaches, which are seen as big company concerns. **Sid** sees this as linkages and integration throughout the enterprise and this includes the customer as part of the enterprise. For Sid you have to '*consider his needs as part of the enterprise'* and *'that's where the enterprise is'*. I suggested that this was beyond classical relationship marketing and Sid used the term '*threading'* to highlight the integration throughout the enterprise he advocates.

Organisational culture and relationships

In the end organisational culture, for Stewart and Durkin (1999), will determine the extent of relationship marketing practice (a management orientation, Mattson, 1997) with networking (the practice of interactions within relationships, Mattson, 1997) having emerged as an important SME interactive marketing tool (Iacobucci, 1996, Coviello, Brodie and Munro, 2000, Harden, 2004). This takes the business closer to the customer base in order to develop via face-to-face involvement (Carson et al, 1995, Coviello and Munro, 1995). Thus much of the literature cites networking, either formal or informal, where individuals may or may not know each other (O'Donnell, 2001) as a key set of SME marketing activities including meetings, conferences and other gatherings listed in Coviello et al's (2000) spectrum. This takes skills but from it, relationships develop into partnerships, alliances and the rest (Carson et al, 1995, Zerrillo and Raine, 1997, Filiatrault and Lapierre, 1997). This is cost effective, proactive marketing through social endeavours (Gilmore, Carson and Shaw, 2001). There may be little resort to externals (Curran and Blackburn, 1994) but international networks may be more formal than domestic ones (Perry, 1999) yet networks conform to industry norms (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). Many agree that personal rather than impersonal promotion is best for the SME (for example Shaw, 1995, Stokes, 2000, O'Donnell, 2001, Collinson and Shaw, 2001, Hill, 2001).

In the **Relationships are obvious and inevitable** discourse **Dave** as an ETD adviser advocates personal contact networks and uses the example of a Durham University research participant who in research is asked about advertising and promotion budgets and he replies *'120000 miles a year'*. He is, of course, referring to being out there building and maintaining relationships with customers. Dave is talking about SME culture where typically the Managing Director is owner and is *'the persona of the company, he's the company's personality …he's the one who gets out and about and shows his face, develops the personal contact networks'.* This can take many forms and can be informal or formal and often a combination. It can be low level and promotional *'sort of gift-oriented'.* For Dave it can be like a friendship *'how you doing, keeping in touch, asking how you are, you know, it's like a barometer'.* It can be good or sometimes it can be *'a bit frosty, you've got to overcome those sorts of ups and downs of the relationship'.* Dave uses the example of a small print company in Ireland to illustrate the strategic alliance between it and DEC (Digital Equipment Corporation) which is very different from **Gordon's** experience as discussed earlier. Dave tells how the relationship

> *'just blossomed to the point where the Irish…em…Managing Director now basically sits in on every training session that Digital do and the staff are involved etc. so they're producing training manuals and all sorts of things for Digital. It really depends whether you want to build that kind of shared philosophy within the company and that can be quite effective'.*

For Dave it really all hinges on change and personalities i.e. the fluidity of relationships and '*market circumstances and entrepreneur personality'*.

In the **Relationships are risk reducers** discourse, **Jane** is another ETD participant to begin to take the idea of relationships further and links the ability to use personal relationships to business survival. Jane, like Charlotte, supports the idea of women in business and suggests that women are better at this because they are better at personal relationships. Like a number of the other ETD participants Jane does not see a problem with different kinds of businesses getting together since someone '*doing photography and someone else doing wedding cakes… You know together we could actually form a really good relationship'.* Therefore, for Jane it is about the *'fit of the relationship'* not products so that small businesses *'collaborate in clusters'*. Jane finds this *'kind of more powerful … a relationship that would have you go to the ends of the earth to collaborate'.* It's not as '*lonely'* and for Jane '*I know women entrepreneurs find that that is a really good way of em…perhaps taking more risks'* and even though this might prolong the length of time needed to establish the business '*there were* *higher chances of survival'*. There is therefore something to be had from different kinds of businesses joining and who would not necessarily share commonalities like industry norms. For **Charles** it is all about win-win situations. To Charles relationships are '*pivotal'* in winning business in a cost effective manner. Charles too sees businesses training together as a positive thing where '*relation**SHIPS**'* work as long as the partners are complementary.

Theme 7: Marketing is about people not a science, art or postmodern debate

My explanation of a more critical approach to management and marketing met with a mix of responses but on balance participants leant toward a more critical perspective on managing their businesses or in the case of the purely ETD people seeing this as an important part of the ETD function for SMEs. Taking my direction from the literature review, I was looking in the research texts for more than marketing orthodoxy or relational approaches. At first participants understood my question to be more relational probing. It can be seen, from the **Marketing is about big business** discourse, that the only participant to take the view that marketing (of the textbook, orthodox variety) is for big business was **Beth.** Beth is a former part time DMS student who was taught orthodox marketing on the programme at the NBS. Beth also expressed the desire to have basic relationships, especially with customers and to practice basic marketing techniques such as exhibitions. In her own way Beth rejected marketing, or at least the kind of marketing perhaps she thought I represented. This is also consistent with Beth's outlook throughout the research text. This is a small business where '*We just want to be small and to be successful and to make a living out of it'*. As can be seen from the **Marketing is networking** discourse **Ann**, an SME principal and **Dave**, an orthodox marketing ETD participant explicitly referred to networking in response to my questioning, thus carrying on with the relational theme. Ann felt it necessary to network extensively and professionally including at conferences and to '*have a presence'* and be involved with the sector in terms of research into child development. Ann is keen on 'ongoing relationships' with all who matter but especially on training (which features in later themes) for staff in terms of the skill base which helps staff retention. There is a particular kind of networking going on with Ann and her business in this sense outside of the usual meetings and business clubs and Ann is very keen to '*still maintain professional links'*. **Dave,** as a purely ETD advisor, expressed a networking *'birds of a feather'* kind of attitude but tied this in with social responsibility in business generally and this is not unlike **Charlotte's** '*relationships with community'* . Dave thought that '*companies have got to be far more sensitive…… in other words environmental issues, emmm the role it plays in the community, particularly where a small firm can be very important in creating a positive or negative impression'* . This could be through sponsorship locally or through '*some sort of shared values'*. Neither Ann nor Dave had any real emphasis in their talk and I assumed some sort of idea of networking is a given in the SME world. I felt with these responses in particular that there was a link between relational and critical perspectives on SME marketing.

SME marketing is not very postmodern

The goal of the postmodernist is originality and relative, subjective meaning. Postmodernism is about things like fragments, hybrids and pastiche (Hassan, 2001) in affluent societies where knowledge itself has become a commodity (Lyotard, 1979). Firat and Ventakesh (1995) have suggested that the postmodern marketing condition has the five elements of hyper-reality, fragmentation, reversed production and consumption, decentred subjects and juxtaposition of opposites. Other writers, such as Arias and Acebron (2001), have expanded this to include more of the structures that are said to be postmodern such as the reorganisation of work structures, turbulent markets or the interest in green marketing and anti-consumption. It is easy to see why academics such as Brown (for example 1993, 1995) wanted to move marketing from a position of marketing as science with its obsession with mechanistic approaches and beliefs in laws (O'Shaughnessy, 1995). Others have been concerned directly with marketing practice (for example Copley and Robson, 2001). For many writers marketing has been the epitome of the postmodern condition and the ultimate postmodern practice (for example Ventakesh, 1989, Firat, 1990, 1991, 1995, Firat and Ventakesh, 1993, Brown, 1993, 1995, 2000, Cova, 1996). Some point out that postmodern theory is an oxymoron and as such is unlikely to be capable of providing a general theory of marketing (Hetrick and Lozada, 1998, Saren, 2000). There is some suggestion that postmodern marketing thought can be more of a catalyst than anything else can. Arias and Acebron (2001) have extended postmodern marketing, especially marketing research, into the BtoB context, which challenges conventional (orthodox) methodology. The eminently practical and pragmatic nature of SME owner-managers and limited budgets may very well inhibit the use of less than orthodox and more subjective and interpretive techniques given the reluctance to conduct any marketing research in the first place.

There is very little evidence of postmodern thinking in the research texts of this study. Only **Peggy,** the ETD marketing adviser with the experience in running small firms is the exception. In the **Marketing is about leadership** discourse my inquiry had led to a management-style response from Peggy as she talked about her role in the enterprise agency but then her involvement with the small business she shares with her partner. Peggy in the former is an orthodox marketing trainer who believes in the modernist marketing tools of APIC and SWOT and indeed uses these in her job, particularly around training needs analysis. As she talked through aspects of this, she moved on to her other role as part of a small firm in the funeral sector. The two roles seem intertwined as Peggy talked about both in terms of '*the **l e a d e r s h i p** and the culture'*. Peggy talks of being on an away day where she was the only one with a marketing planning approach in mind and she was '*totally jarring with the rest of the management team'*. The kind of marketing mix had been '***HUGELY***' affected by a culture that was dominated by relationship selling. Peggy remained '***s o s u r e'*** that she was right to take a more orthodox view on it. The emphasis placed on '***l e a d e r s h i p'***, '***HUGELY'*** and '***s o s u r e'*** shows Peggy to be confident, convinced and convincing that leadership stems from traditional, orthodox marketing. However, Peggy is a contradiction. On the one hand, with training needs analysis and her SWOT and APIC approaches to training and development and on the other with her psychology-based management of her team and her belief in and her conversion to '*relationship selling'*. I explore further with regard to management style and practice and raise the mechanistic/organic spectrum and management science. I suggest to Peggy that she appears to be involved with '*two ideologies clashing'*. Peggy agreed with a '*yeah'*. I had thought we were moving in to the critical theory of management area but for whatever reason Peggy shifted her thinking toward her other role as part of a small business in the funeral sector. In this sector there is a different kind of leadership with a '*lot of family-led businesses and a lot of very old fashioned, white, middle class, middle aged **MEN** as the father figure running the firm'.* The emphasis on ***MEN*** points toward a gender issue since it is '*the younger son's coming in and wanting to be more modern and try alternative ways and, and that the funeral sector will be totally revolutionised, I'm convinced of it, in the next 10 years and will be a very interesting sector to analyse in marketing terms'.* We talked about this for the rest of the interview, about what was happening in America and relationships changing and the idea that rather than being family led funerals will be market led. Peggy then uses the term, unprompted from me, '*postmodern funeral people'*, to describe that with which she is involved.

Critical Theory, marketing and society

Critical Theory places emphasis on power and the effects of knowledge (Morgan, 1992) and calls for a people-centred rather than technical approach to solving problems. In contemporary management terms, especially with regard to values, a social science approach and especially the role of reason is introduced to understand what is important in management as opposed to traditional preoccupations such as profitable growth and managerial rule that are often dressed up in liberated and innovative language (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). Language such as TQM and Business Process Reengineering and ideas within these areas has little to do with the rationality of contemporary management theory and practice (Copley and Robson, 1996). Non-rational strategy has been used in organisational behaviour from a sociological perspective and applied to marketing management because of the perceived shortfall of the normative, prescriptive (positivist) management models in practice(for example Smith, 2002). Ironically, some aspects of marketing had earlier adopted a critical perspective in the 1950s and 1960s that produced the Consumer Movement but marketing orthodoxy was legitimised through the advent of Kotler's Societal Marketing Concept. For some writers this is a seductive proposition (for example Morgan, 2003) and the debate has not gone away (for example Kline, 2000). It would seem that Critical Theory might provide an alternative approach to management, including marketing management (Morgan, 2003). Others such as Saren (2000), having considered both orthodoxy and Critical Theory, see relationship marketing as having the best prospects of providing a basis for a new theory of marketing. Others see it differently. Critical Theory has arrived across the board from anthropology to film to religion (Bronner, 1993). The essence of Critical Theory is its emancipatory imperative, the opposite of systems and reductionism. Latter day critical theorists sum up the role of Critical Theory in societal terms as rational democratic development of modern institutions where citizens are less entranced by the prevailing order (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996) and the promotion of self-expression leading to false consumers with big business at the helm of pop (not avant-guard) culture (Morgan, 1996a). In terms of the changes that have occurred technologically and globally, we are now in the information age (D'Aveni, 1994). Critical Theory is about consciousness, how we see things and the role of ideas (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four paradigms - functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist – eventually lead to a social construction direction (Mills, 2001).

Naomi was the only participant in this study to converse in a 'Hidden Persuader'-type way. Naomi was the SME participant who I featured in **theme 2/discourse 2b (Foreground/background)** so that right from the start comments are made about the power of advertising and worries about this yet at the same time it became apparent that her business life and personal views intertwine. Naomi saw marketing as being very important to the businesses and getting people to buy into what it is about. Naomi's reference points are Levi, Ray-Ban and the sales promotions that happen in the pub that I conducted the interview in. Throughout the interview, Naomi returned to this tension between a kind of social responsibility, and what marketing, but especially promotions, can do for her and her business. During the interview, Naomi took the issue away from the business context into everyday life where she felt exposed to marketing all of the time '*on every item that you pick up'*. Naomi is interested in the subliminal aspects of TV advertising in particular. That was when we got on to Tom Cruise, Ray-Bans and Levi and the exchange continues around everyday objects that are cultural artefacts such as jeans and music. This seems to me to be somewhat of a postmodern outlook from Naomi that was reinforced by her attitude toward my semiotic example about shopping and buying things without noticing. Naomi agreed, commenting that she often buys things then later wonders why, asking *'why did I get that I don't even like it?'*. We talked about other forms of related marketing, such as celebrity endorsement, that Naomi thought worked but

Naomi had concerns about watching advertising for the aforementioned reasons. Naomi was in a dilemma in that:

> '*it's true we're all trying to get …marketing ideas but I mean I, I try and not watch the adverts on TV so……I hate that idea of being influenced… in my own home with them not inviting…assuming the authority to be able to do that'.*

Naomi found '*radio advertising really annoying. It'll stick in your head…radio advertising could be anything like Frankie's Parking (laughs) or…ohhh'.* Naomi had clearly been thinking in terms of messages and media and the kind of audiences a medium like local radio would attract. In the exchange we talked about local advertising and more recent opportunities such as Drive Time and Naomi's observations of marketing tactics at least were accurate '*it's a certain age… the guy who's driving from a to b'.* I reminded Naomi of her own example of parking and she added '*That's a prime example'.*

Critical Theory, organic management and marketing

Critical Theory facilitates critical reflection as a way out of psychic prison. It is an alternative way to understand institutions, rather than the ideology of domination that is Taylorism, which is a mode of technocratic thinking. Critical Theory involves the generation of knowledge and realisation of human interests (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). Action is coordinated by systems (Burrell and Morgan (1979) and by mediated norms and values and socially defined ends and meanings which constitute the 'life world' (Robinson, 2005). However, this depends on power relations (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996).

Applying this Critical Theory approach to management Morgan's (1996b) metaphor approach was useful to use in the interviews of this study since favoured metaphors that can trap managers into ways of seeing and therefore ways of not seeing so that the metaphor can be used to see, understand and shape situations. The metaphors range from the machine to domination. The two metaphors that surfaced most in this study were the machine and the organism. The machine metaphor is closest to Taylorism and uses workers as adjuncts to machines (Morgan, 1996b) where the thinking is done by managers and the approach works where tasks are simple, the environment is stable and the product consistent and mono, precision is premium and workers compliant. This is similar to Mintzberg's (1994) divisionalised organisation. Organisations as organisms adapt to environmental conditions in an open system that is not closed and mechanical and where work conditions, salaries, the job as an expression of the employee's life, impact of new technology and the like are important. Here management involves relations between internal and external elements of the environment. Where environments are turbulent, the machine-like organisation would not be able to cope but in any event, a mix of metaphors may produce a style of thinking that is open and is evolutionary and is well suited to dealing with the complexity that is organisational life (Morgan, 1996b). The people centred approach to problem solving can be harnessed to address management problems and the role of reason is introduced since within Critical Theory mere technical problem is bogus. Managers and managerial functions do not exist in a vacuum and hierarchical structures flattened and the social system becomes more complex. Sovereignty is not integral to human nature but is socially reproduced. Critical theory offers emancipation not means-ends rationality and many 'management science' managers would see it as subversive since the science tag legitimises technocracy. Such managers exercise control through the rhetoric of language in order to subjugate and dominate rather than manage others in a way that a rider or handler does a horse unless there is elitism involved (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). Managers or executives are prone to 'satisficing' as they go, which limits scope and where the challenge is to step outside the traditional management paradigm (Mintzberg, 1994b) but the main thrust of the Critical Theory argument is the problems of manager as technicist rather than the employment of critical reasoning. The paradox is that being a technicist appears to secure ones social position but in the end, they themselves are viewed as units of labour. Through Critical Theory, management becomes social practice, more democratically accountable and a means of enabling liberation. However, it does not refute the need for techniques but deals in resolution through power relations and emancipation through empathy, intuition and being more organic via 'webs of inclusion' to achieve the social construction of a shared reality (Morgan, 1996b).

In the **Marketing is about people not robots; enlightenment means organic not mechanistic** discourse **Jack** saw the robotic nature of employees and workers as belonging to large organisations but for small businesses '*it might be imperative'* that people are able to function differently to the '*right, set you away at that'* kind of task. In contrast to **Beth**, Jack believed you can have people of a robotic nature in large organisations '*where the business process can be broken down into those stages'* but in Jack's business it's different. Jack is concerned that his full time employee is much more than a robot because he needs Mark to:

> '*be able to react in the way that he might be in the middle of something and we get a big order …get a big order comes in and he has to stop what he's doing there and get on with bringing this order in, in that it might be imperative..'*.

Mark could not simply be trained to function in a mechanistic way and still perform for the business in the way in which Jack wants. **Sean** is an ETD participant who saw this as an organic/mechanistic issue where the latter sometimes exists and can work but the wellbeing of those involved has to be paid attention to. Sean thought that there were few '*enlightened SMEs'* who understand '*the principle driver and requirements and you mentioned there the relationship, relational-type issues'* and that '*most enlightened people would try and match that …with the wellbeing and if you like sense of achievement with all of the people within the company'.* Sean understood this is not easy to put into practice '*the critical approach to the whole thing'.* Sean was unsure where I was going with this so I explained the metaphor approach and we talked in terms of McDonald's and Kwik Fit fitters as potential examples of the machine, psychic prisons and the rest. Sean immediately said '*Organic'.* I suggested there are opposing views in the literature and Sean immediately said '*Mechanistic'.* Sean then contextualised this line of inquiry with Nissan in mind. He was still thinking about relationships and '*maintaining wellbeing, goodwill…all of the stakeholders will always improve productivity, without a **DOUBT**'.* The emphasis suggested Sean's belief in this relational/critical approach to managing but that Sean questioned the ability of the firm to afford more than the mechanistic approach and used the example of Nissan where the job may be highly mechanistic but relationships '*will always influence the overall complex performance'.* I pressed a little further on ethics, sexual politics and the like and Sean suggested that there were issues but taking action can be counter-productive i.e. that with some of this at least there is a falseness to them that can cause damage. The organisation should take an '*educated …err…overview just to…just how far the pendulum should swing before it becomes an enemy to itself if you like (laughs) and that I think that goes for all of those issues that you're talking about'*.

Critical Theory does not mean critical marketing theory

In terms of marketing, the literature can be traced back to the aforementioned Frankfurt School through to Marcuse and 'One Dimensional Man' (1964) and to ideas around the fetishism of commodities and the social construction of markets and marketing. Morgan (1996b) sees marketing as a series of discourses because it is involved with objects of consumption. Morgan sees three discourses worthy of discussion; marketing as an academic discourse, as management practice and marketing technologies and the notion of the governable consumer. For Morgan, attempts to undermine orthodox marketing have been limited, but that the deconstruction and reconstruction of marketing has led to some understanding of the self in relation to society while Saren (2000) declares Critical Theory unlikely to be able to provide a basis for marketing theory. Others such as Smith (2003) maintain the reason strategic marketing planning (the pinnacle of marketing orthodoxy) is problematic is because it is too difficult to use in practice but Smith tries to address the problem of high velocity environments with organisational culture.

With **Charlotte,** in **The Babel Fish** discourse, the response was all about relationships and in particular, the way employees deal with customers where critical thinking for herself and the people in her business is central. We talked at length about differences in gender, women in business and political correctness. I moved back onto the idea of '*plonking'* and the orthodoxy, relationships and a more critical approach and Charlotte was patient, occasionally appearing to agree with an '*mmm'* here and an '*mmmm'* there. Charlotte went back to the 4Ps and what may or may not be included and commented that the '*interesting things are also things that could be left out'*. Charlotte emphasised that it was about much more than the 4Ps '*but **that's not the only thing that there is'*** and almost sang this for emphasis. Charlotte felt that the '*4Ps are pretty hard nosed Ps aren't they? They're all about, you know,*

POSITION AND PLACE AND PRICE AND PRODUCT'. Charlotte rapped the table for effect adding '*unless you've got a …**phewwww**…some decent people who are actually translating those things into emm…into sales and relationships'*. Therefore, for Charlotte it was how you treat people and develop relationships otherwise you might as well '*finish up'*. In order to emphasise her people perspective Charlotte then talked of spending millions on a marketing campaign:

> '*but if a person gets on the phone in our office and is rude you've wasted…and I think that's the thing isn't it, you can have, you can do all of that stuff, but actually unless there's a person who can translate that …emm…its almost like the Babel Fish…emm…'*.

I asked what Charlotte meant, not being up to speed on certain literature so Charlotte enlightened me. This turns out to be a reference to The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy and Charlotte explained that:

> '*the Babel Fish can read …can understand what everybody's saying…and from this book…if you do all that stuff…from one end and you don't understand want… again you might as well give up and go home and that's …you know it's actually being able to …once somebody can lead your 4Ps and warm them up so people want them above the rest of the competition and …its about that whole feeling of, you know……but it's not, it's not the only …left brain stuff its the people…I'm not good on left brain…'*. I bring in the old adage that '*you know about an organization from the reception you get than you would from the chairman's statement in the company report'* and to Charlotte this is obvious. '*Course you do…it's like that whole thing about Enron, you know err corporate governance, it's all sticky plaster stuff. **WE SHOULD NOT BE HAVING** to tell people…shouldn't have to legislate for decent corporate behaviour'*.

Charlotte's use of the Babel Fish seems to me to be a good example of Morgan's metaphors in action. This is because Charlotte is the kind of SME MD who has a wide and deep view of the world with her obvious passion for relationships and community. I took the opportunity to emphasise the idea of moving from simple linear relationships but Charlotte believed '*it's not just these **LINEAR** things, you know these linear relationships, it's much, much different than that and it's emm…on a day-to-day err practical level'*. Charlotte seemed to see things in a non-linear way and in an organic way '*goes back to what you were saying about the Americans and their resistance to relationship…go back to the old fashioned…emm… market place* *where you've got people making widgets …that was the perceived view, you know **D, D, D, D, D …LINEAR** pattern'.* Charlotte felt that customers are now more discerning and that an open mind has to be kept as to the nature of the relationship because you are '*always, like living in flux so that when there's a next, when there's a shift, you've got the relationships open quite quickly …to meet that shift.* I pressed a little further with the machine metaphor and use the McDonald's operative as an example and suggested that from what Charlotte has just said in her view management is not like that. Charlotte was emphatic that '*It's organic, it's, it's, organic and democratic'* but added that she had learnt the hard way that sometimes the situation dictates that the '*autocratic stuff is actually far more appropriate than the organic, developmental stuff'.* I suggested that I have a spectrum in mind but Charlotte did not buy into my language. This reinforced my impression of Charlotte as the epitome of Morgan's style of thinking, Charlotte being very flexible and able to cope with all eventualities almost like a science fiction shape shifter and mentioned dealing with:

> '*more mechanistic…more structured…much, much more linear'* but has a team that is a '*very, very intelligent group of people which I……they're far intellectual, far brighter than I am …and to keep those sort of people on task and happy and fulfilled …you have to constantly juggle emm…even if it's …not knowingly…but that's what you have to do'.*

SME marketing is cultural and entwined with relational and critical perspectives

The culture bound hypothesis is beyond the parameters of this thesis. It is worth noting however, that culture will impact on the kind of management and marketing that might operate in a given setting but the literature is not equivocal. The American Management Paradigm is said to be a ruthless male-dominated management style that often comes with a strong female sub-culture (Morgan, 1996b). In marketing terms there is an early adoption of the management science based 4P mantra as part of this paradigm but later we seen this being mediated by the European driven relationship approach (Baker, 2000b) that is social democrat (Weir, 1999). There is also evidence of influences in the opposite direction with American companies taking on Japanese quality influences and the discarding of self-interest in favour of inter-organisational relationships where hierarch means something very different from that of the traditional American model, where for example customer satisfaction is achieved with profit (Morgan, 1996b). Quality (in terms of accountability, respect and trust) is put ahead of profit and is inclusive where workers at least in part manage their own effort (Amsden, 1996). The ‘marketing prescriptions’ of the orthodox paradigm were thought to be over-prudent in their claims (Marion, 1993) and unsuccessful in explaining competitive performance (Baker, 2000b). By the mid-1990s the relationship marketing paradigm had found firm root within the European context and was developed in direct competition to the modernist marketing mix where there was no apparent reflection of reality (Gummerson, 1993) with an interest in interrelations within networks (Gronroos, 1994). However, there is support for the idea of mutually satisfying exchange (as opposed to transaction) relationship working with the 4P approach if not in a one-off transaction context i.e. in long-term relationships (Baker, 2000b).

The evidence in the **Marketing is part of a triangle** discourse confirms that in addition to orthodox and relational marketing, critical issues can be added to SME marketing. **Geoff** and **Heather**, like **Charles** are ETD participants who quite liked the idea of some sort of framework Geoff thought it depended on the stage of the business and was still preoccupied with the idea of a Ps extension while Heather returned to her favourite subject of development where ‘*if people have balance the function will happen’.* Charles liked the idea of *‘developing marketing around those areas, around that triangle or having that triangle sitting in marketing instead of perhaps looking at the 4Ps you look at the 3 points on the triangle. And, yeah, developing those for each SME or each level of SME’.* Charles returned to the idea that the 4Ps exist anyway and if:

> ‘*they have the wrong product in the wrong market then effectively they ain’t going to go very far emm…in my eyes. If you try to sell emm…oh, I don’t know, ice cubes to Eskimos, for example, you know you’ve just got to, it’s not in the right place’.*

Charles added that:

> ‘*if you can focus on those other three points in the triangle …likes of you’re training, you’re ethical issues, emm, making those commercial, emm, for*

> *example would, would add another string to the bow of the SME, to their business'.*

Geoff was still thinking about the Ps. '*You've already encouraged me to think of a 5th P and that's to put people into that'*. However, this is the usual extension of the Ps and I wondered if there was more from Geoff. Geoff highlighted a '*stage of development'* belief in getting the basics right if the '*business is embryonic'* where:

> '*I wouldn't want to introduce too many …complications at that embryonic stage but as the business grows, that's when they do start to expand on those basics and start to bring in the other factors. I think you have to be careful that you don't overload people at, at the wrong stage'.*

We carried on talking about it for a while and Heather asked '*which way is your triangle? Is it that way? (Heather points her fingers up) or is it that way? (Heather points her fingers down).* I said *'I'm not sure'* and questioned whether it would be a triangle at all '*Whether it's an actual triangle or whether it's three dimensional'*. Heather interrupted and said '*It could be three dimensional'*. Heather *went* on '*I always think I've been that way…because I'm, emm, in terms of development it's that way (Heather points up)…right. In terms of getting customers for me it's that way'*. Heather pointed down and I gestured as to the shape of a triangle and the talk continued for a while with more on developing people as a business coach.

Theme 8: There are many interpretations of ETD in SME-land

This theme emerged from attitudes toward ETD, whether these are favourable or unfavourable. This includes the role of the enterprise and development agencies and the nature of SME managers.

Training and development is for us/is not for us

The training and skills gap debate and 'Standards' (McBride, 1998) are part of the concern over low management competence including that of SME managers (Matlay, 2004, Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Smith et al, 1999). There is a tension between academic and more competency-based qualifications like NVQs. Problems are perceived with the latter such as jargon and relevancy to day-to-day requirements of managers (Cannon and Taylor, 1994, Storey et al, 1997, Smith et al, 1999, Loan-Clarke, 2000). There is concern also for bottom line benefits (Smith et al, 1999) and bespoke and informal delivery methods (De Faoite et al, 2004). There is a need to deal with long-term policy and short-term learning needs of SMEs (Matlay, 2004). Business culture (Smith and Whittaker, 1998), lack of senior management qualifications (Whittaker et al, 1997), narrow experiential 'learn by doing' or 'school of hard knocks' approach to learning and integration of formal and informal methods and the lack of value place by SMEs on competence-based qualifications are some of the issues in the literature (Smith and Whittaker, 1998, Loan-Clarke, 2000). The literature also suggests the broader role and difficulties in maintaining commitment mean there is a need to customise training needs for the SME manager (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000). In terms of assessment trainers are seen as too academic, without the credibility of managers, not up-to-date and inexperienced (Smith et al, 1999). Issues raised in the literature include training staff that move on, training deficiency through too much emphasis on technical and not enough on managerial skills, a preference for contextualisation in the work place and support in terms of time and training facilities. There is a role for learning agreements, informal one-to-one experience (including within networking), reluctance to take part in external training, and a need to deal with the diversity of the SME environment (Smith et al, 1999, Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, Matlay, 2004).

In this study, there is evidence of both a desire and no desire to engage with ETD on the part of the SME participants. In **Enterprise and development training is for us Ann** was the SME participant who '*could do with more education'* using the professional business bodies. Ann was keen to use this source of knowledge and information but would only do so when a specific issue arose. Ann was aware of regeneration packages from the EDAs but would only look at these as and when needed. Ann conceded that the senior team could do with more basic training on marketing and finance. As an individual and a leader, Ann wanted something more strategic to get better understanding, a bigger picture. Ann's main concern was the quality of employees and their degree qualifications. They would have to be more able and at '*a level so that they are not operating by good fortune'*. By qualified Ann meant being able to do the tasks and used the example of a communications employee who had to have grammar corrected. Ann knew what kind of skills she wanted for people and described the functional technical and interpersonal skills for ordinary staff as people on the front line who meet, greet and sell and give *'people positive experiences of using our company'.* At a higher level of senior management team, more managerial and creative/entrepreneurial skills are required to shape ideas and take them forward. Ann needed people who have a certain level of knowledge and expertise '*who actually grow the business'.* I asked if there was a link between developing the business and ETD of the individual and Ann agreed that there has to be a direct benefit for the business and emphasised this with '***CANNOT** just have a free-for –all for staff in terms of training. It takes a huge amount of investment in both time and money'* reflecting Ann's caution with the company's money.

In contrast to Ann but in the same vein, **Jack** was another SME principal who was much more in line with the literature in the sense that in the **Enterprise and development training is not for us** discourse Jack understood what I was saying but was not interested in any of it. He realised '*the benefits of training'* but had no use for it. He has trained up his full time man himself as a '*clone of me really'* and does not engage with outside training. What was paradoxical about Jack was that he was the participant who earlier in the interview said he was keen on training for networking as a tool for the business so that Jack, in certain circumstances, would be very interested. There was no interest shown from Ann, Jack or any of the other SME participants in NVQs or any form of accreditation or qualification.

The role of the enterprise and development agencies (EDAs)

As part of their remit, the EDAs also engage with ETD for SMEs as part of support that helps build competitive advantage, enhance business effectiveness and achieve economic growth (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000, De Faoite et al, 2004). The competitive position of the business (Smith et al, 1999) and help with survival rates of SMEs (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000) are concerns of the EDAs. Training is perceived as beneficial but not linked to actual success and development opportunities that go beyond mere training are even harder to obtain, especially with SMEs (Smith and Whittaker, 1998). Even though hard to prove there is some evidence that training improves performance Massey (2004). In terms of management training and development, more generally, there has been some progress (Loan-Clarke et al, 2000) but this for Smith and Whittaker (1998) is generally slow. Overall it can be said that there are too many variables to draw the definite conclusion that training either managers or at the executive level helps survival or growth and development. Nor can it be conclusively said that an absence of training leads to business failure.

The role of most of the agencies overall is broader than the SME arena but in terms of this many of the agency activities are known to the participants of this study. This is not surprising since half of the participant work for the various agencies in the North East of England and some of the SME participants have been involved at some stage or other. **Ann,** as presented above, stated that she would use the agencies in a particular way, as would most of the SME participants with the exception of **Jack**. Some of the ETD participants expressed another dimension of the agency role. In the **You have to keep SME people 'at it', so offer them more than mere ETD** discourse, **Sid** was the ETD participant with a lot of experience as an SME principal. Sid added another layer to this theme by suggesting that part of the role of the trainer is to keep SME people *'at it'* to counter one of the barriers to training that is the SME person's inability to see through to the end of a training programme. For Sid you have to form some sort of '*ohhhhh…umbilical connection…right? …SMEs and the people who work in them are the world's worst for letting things go astray'.* Only when you have achieved the objective, when '*you've altered their behaviour in a permanent way towards what you've been trying to over to them and that they…they…you've developed their competencies etc'.* For **Dave,** an orthodox marketing ETD participant, the answer lies in agencies offering more than just ETD. Earlier Dave had advocated innovation and creativity in delivery but at this stage he urged providers to think on two levels; the operational level and at the company level. With SME owner-managers, '*particularly if it's owner-manager/senior partners involved... emm... it's got to be longer term, it's got to be reflective... emm... you've got to be looking at putting measures in place in terms of sort of before and after to see that the actual training is worthwhile and having some impact on the company'*. Dave suggested this will pacify '*the hard nosed businessman'* who wants to *'get something else out of it as well in terms of … personal development'.* Dave saw the role of provider in terms of giving the owner-manager the right kind of ***'EXPERTISE'*** so that in meetings of one sort or another he was prepared to '***ASK** pertinent questions and put people on the spot'*. The emphasis on these words underlines the importance placed by Dave on role of the ETA and SME ETD.

Entrepreneurial and ordinary small firm managers

The 'entrepreneurial' and the 'ordinary' SME manager are seen as being significantly different, particularly the area of strategic thinking where it could be argued that it is the very entrepreneurial streak that is the antithesis of the kind of strategic thinking educators and trainers try to impose on SMEs. Motivation is seen to be different (Copley and Evans, 1986, Williams and Turnbull, 1999). This can have an effect on outcomes such as attitudes towards marketing tools. For example, the SME manager may undertake sponsorship for philanthropic reasons than the more strategy-oriented entrepreneur or big company manager or the entrepreneur might move toward an administrative orientation as the business develops (Birley and Gibb, 1984). Back-to-school problems were a certainty with such people (Deeks and Wilkie, 1973). Real experiences were not only desirable but expected (Ouh, 1986).

With the **Easiest, cheapest, quickest or it has to be practical and experiential (can't afford thinking)** discourse, it is the ETD participants that are, again, vocal. For **Geoff,** when the owner-manager '*stops **DOING** business and starts **THINKING** business'* development occurs but Geoff goes on '*But somebody who is just a one man band can't stop doing it. Has to do (laughs) emm, sometimes you have to err perhaps enlist the help of somebody else to do the thinking, help him start make that move'.* **Jane** responded to the initial questioning with a '*learning by doing appr…approach within a training session itself*' . Jane was interested in '*reasoning… examples of things that have happened or you know things that I've had kind of…demonstrates how important marketing is in all aspects of running a business, I think perhaps that can only be experienced by actual action, within a training/marketing context rather than each being told.'* **Peggy** was different from Geoff and Jane as ETD advisers, possibly because of her training needs analysis experience. Peggy immediately said '*Workshops'* in response to my original questioning and I tried to probe further but Peggy was somebody with her own business experience who has a key marketing ETD role in an enterprise agency and knows what she is about. Peggy went on to talk about a dilemma, with emphasis, about the kind of enterprise agency she works for and that '*we emm sell a message'*. This is a not for profit agency that is '*here to help companies and we've got to make money doing **IT** because if we don't we can't do **IT'** but…and we believe we're the best and the best value for pricing doing it emm…but we don't sell people things they **d o n ' t n e e d'***. Peggy went on to say that occasionally a client will be determined to have something like a training package that she knows is not right for them and '*it's very difficult to walk away from that'* and '*who are **we** to make that judgement and that call?'*.

Theme 9: Marketing ETD can be delivered but there are many and changing ways to delivery

The last theme to emerge from the research text is about SME marketing ETD delivery. This includes traditional/formal and social/informal methods of delivery, the stage of development and SMEs and delivering experientially.

Effective delivery is a requirement

Delivery of ETD can be both simple and complex. The literature suggests an increasingly complex learning environment than mere knowledge transfer is required if SMEs and even smaller firms are to be helped to develop. This goes beyond training but there are resource constraints and cost-effectiveness will always be present. Businesses need to be helped to be adaptive through managerial (even entrepreneurial in some cases) skills for development as well as providing more basic functional, mechanical and administrative skills (Carson and Gilmore, 1999). How such skills are delivered is of importance and part of the equation if ETD objectives are to address real need. The key to successful delivery of learning is flexibility (Bathie, 1985). The modes of delivery range from the formal course to open/distance/flexible learning. There are clearly pros and cons to each and the learning environment is also important. Measurement of outcomes is clearly important in the SME limited resource context.

Regardless of mode of delivery, with an ever-present eye on cost-effectiveness there will always be concern for how that can be measured. Concern was expressed across the participants about the cost of ETD, especially training. In the **Whatever it is there has to be a measurable result** discourse **Sid** was the ETD participant with lot of experience of running SMEs and was concerned about achieving objectives and measuring progress and what a programme is achieving where '*outcomes would be a big added value thing for me, yeah'.* An outcome for Sid was '*A step made that hasn't been achieved before'.* Some things are difficult to measure like change in mindset of degree of fulfilment but you have to try to measure changes in relationships with customers for example. **Sean** is another ETD participant concerned with relevancy and measurement since there is no room for waste. Sean saw a mix of methods in operation from '*formal instruction, carrying things out in the work place, doing work-based learning type of activities, the stuff acceptable to SMEs.* The time of delivery was important. If the output was to be useful to the business, '*then it could be done in the company's working time'.* Sean thought a contemporary issue project, possibly with several other companies could be part of a training package with seminars and located on different business premises, maybe because '*they do it better than you and you can share best practice and that is where the added value comes from'*. For Sean the objective is to '*deliver the solution in a flexible way'.*

Social methods of delivery

The social character of learning comes in to the equation as do the community of practice (CoP) and the social construction of knowledge. Delivering marketing ETD to SMEs like many other contexts sees social interaction as being of great importance. Speakers at events have to be credible for social influence to take place both at the personal and business development levels. This should not occur by accident but should be built in to programmes and continually fostered. One of Carson and Gilmore's (1999) three marketing fundamentals is network marketing that allows the firm to be viewed within its social context that, they maintain, has been neglected by both traditional marketing and traditional entrepreneurship. It may be fair to say that the 'advent' of relationship marketing has changed this position somewhat. However, networks are not the same as relationships. The extent of proactive use of networks by the small firms' manager is debatable and must depend upon the skills/competencies of the individual to begin with. Carson and Gilmore see networking as an essential part of the existence of the small firm including the development of competencies. For Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001) networking is key and an end in itself. For Stokes (1999), if they prefer networking (and this seems to be the case with, for example, a preference for informal networking as opposed to formal marketing research as a means to building information) and interactive marketing methods then they will welcome this as part of ETD. Williams and Turnbull (1999) add that entrepreneurs can give something back to education and training where entrepreneurs are concerned that students should be able to apply knowledge rather than simply accumulate it. This does suggest, however, a kind of mistrust on the part of small firm managers/entrepreneurs of the ability of providers to put theory into practice themselves. The Internet, as a learning delivery method that is almost the opposite of social learning, is also considered in the literature. The pressure on resources makes directed private study an attractive proposition. Access to the Internet for education purposes has so far been undirected but in future, a co-operative learning process between student and tutor is possible. Interconnectivity for learning support is a key issue (Maclaran and Catterall, 1999). However, within the context of the learner here, the small firm manager, learning objectives and pedagogical considerations are different from those involving the mainstream student. This kind of learner, more than most, is the opposite of the passive learner of the past. The Internet and other networks should be of particular value to this context. However, the social aspect of learning is clearly important to SMEs so that it is perhaps not too surprising that SMEs have been slow to take up the Internet as a learning tool. There is the likelihood that the Internet is used to build contacts and in that sense, it is part of networking (Blackburn and Athayde, 2000).

There is little in the primary research of this thesis that deals with the Internet as a method of delivering learning. It is clear that training should involve competencies and vocational skills but there is a higher order of training and development requirement for a more critical perspective. In some cases, ETD could actually be discounted as irrelevant to the business. In the **Nothing fits our business** discourse both **Jack** and **Beth** were SME principals whose research texts revealed this discourse. Neither was enthusiastic about going on training courses. While Jack was not against some form of training to meet a need identified in the business (as with having someone trained to be able to network), Beth rejected this out of hand in favour of buying in any technical skills that may be required such as IT as mentioned in earlier themes. The size of the business in both cases was the key determinant, however, and both felt that nothing really fitted the business. In contrast, social learning was prominent in the research texts of this study. The **Learning is best when it is social** discourse saw four of the ETD participants (**Dave, Jane, Geoff** and **Heather**) in favour of a kind of social intercourse as an ingredient in the learning process. Dave had noticed interaction between small firm owner-managers on marketing training courses that is informal and welcome. The emphasis on ***SUCK*** is quite evocative of the intensity witnessed by Dave as with '*the ones with better vision are always looking to ...* ***SUCK*** *in new ideas from other people'*. Dave likened this to being with friends, not being isolated and using others as sounding boards. Dave was also an advocate of networking and being proactive for success. **Jane** felt that people who run businesses do not like the kind of learning found on modules that are '*almost like back to school-type thing'*. They want '*the excitement and flexibility of change and a sort of 'now, now, now' sort of type of activity'*. They want things fast and they learn by doing. Coaching and mentoring may well be good techniques for problem solving. Problems can be solved in a group with others. In a practical way Jane was an advocate of collaborations whereby SMEs can club together to give them more power to enable them to fight for contracts they would not have a chance of on their own. **Geoff** believed SMEs '*are warming to the networking approach'*. Geoff was an ETD adviser who was involved with sponsoring a private business club which had '*hard core of regular attenders'* with … *'40 to 50 people'* who ' *come along to these events, sometimes more'*. These events do not use guest speakers but they do have guests, *'in conversation with'*, that is rather less formal than a stand-up speaker. The usual mingling and networking that is very informal follows.

Experiential learning as delivery

The Knowledge Transfer Partnership has now replaced the old Teaching Company scheme but this is still designed to help the limited resources of SMEs and is a valuable part of the support infrastructure, especially to struggling SMEs (Sparrow, 1999). SME managers do not necessarily lack the ability to think strategically but they can benefit from a better approach to analysis if the resource is available. SME managers do things differently in terms of the more conventional marketing decision-making practices of large companies (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). Marketing is by no means a priority in some SMEs (Fuller, 1994) and maybe simply cannot implement the marketing concept (Meziou, 1991). Poor marketing practice including planning and implementation leads to small business failure (Hogarth-Scott et al, 1996). SMEs have to be innovative and entrepreneurial to compete and the Knowledge Transfer Partnership scheme is designed to help in all of this to implement the marketing concept and advance business growth through providing resources but also learning. After knowledge and information transfer comes an appreciation of marketing education and support. These are Carson's (1993) three levels of marketing technology transfer.

In the **Learning is experiential** discourse the responses from **Charlotte, Sean** and **Peggy** were in many ways similar. Charlotte was as clear as ever and straight into her stride. Charlotte was used in chapter six to illustrate how experiential learning could be seen as a method of delivery. Charlotte explained that, at one time, she had thought experiential learning was everything but had come to realise that not everything can be learnt experientially. However, it is Charlotte's business, which brings people together to network and learn, that makes Charlotte a good example of experiential learning as method of delivery. Charlotte responds '***that is what I do'.*** Charlotte would herself have appreciated '*real practical nuts and bolts things'* on how to run a business. Charlotte had changed and felt businesses need '*the technical skills and stuff, you need to have that framework …and then the experiential stuff enriches the framework. I think either one or the other …then it becomes much harder work*'. **Charles** too was presented in chapter six as an ETD participant who was in favour of 'w*ork-**BASED** training'* whereby he can get a better feel for the client when on the client's premises and managers act differently '*It's just getting in an environment that they're comfortable with… naturally. Emm, some people for whatever reason may not be comfortable in the university'.* Charles believed in learning by doing in situ.

Mentoring and coaching

Informal learning methods like networking may be a more naturalistic approach to teaching and learning and very good in itself but very poor on programmes i.e. it is not easy to teach someone how to network (De Faoite et al, 2004). Other informal methods include advising, mentoring and coaching. Mentoring is all about the SME or small business manager taking ‘wise counsel’ (Breaterton, Thompson and Hyland, 2006). There are a variety of mentoring roles proposed by Bolton and Thompson (2004) including the sculptor who crafts and the psychologist who deals with problems. Coaching is a two way communication process and is a contribution to the coachee achieving personal objectives and this can be life coaching or for the business. Coaching in marketing is rather like a sports coach where help is on hand to diagnose what is ‘going on in the battlefield, what can be improved and how to improve it (Champathes, 2006). Mentors and coaches can also be business angels and can be combined with networking to establish a network of members who engage in social activity. These people are in the best position to develop views on innovation, have an impact on informal networks, be aware of employee morale and have a key role in change (Sage, 2002).

As might be expected, there was some mention of mentoring and coaching as methods of delivering ETD on the part of the ETD advisers. The biggest contribution however came from **Heather**, a business adviser for her agency and a business coach in her own business. Heather was definite about the difference between mentors and coaches and clearly believed in coaching as a way to deliver ETD support. *‘**COACH** is non-directive, non-judgemental…we work with the individual…to help them go through change, whatever that change might be. For example it might be that you have someone working in a marketing department being asked to perform a particular skill’.* This is all about working with the individual and Heather at least believed that coaching is more powerful than mentoring or advising.

The ROC SME marketing schema and ETD context

From the discussion above, there is evidence that supports a relational, orthodox and critical approach to SME marketing. I have labelled this the ROC marketing schema as an original contribution to SME marketing as summarised in the final chapter of the thesis. These three ROC (relational, orthodox and critical) paradigms or ways of seeing are conceptualised as planes of a tetrahedron. Each plane contains issues but they also interface with each other. On each interface, there are more issues. These are complex and potentially problematic interfaces. However, it is argued here that relational infusions are the catalyst for critical theory and marketing orthodoxy to marry. This schema, illustrated below (in a two dimensional figure that uses dotted lines to represent folds in the lines of a solid object) in figure 7.1, should be carefully considered before any form of SME marketing ETD programme and materials are designed and delivered.

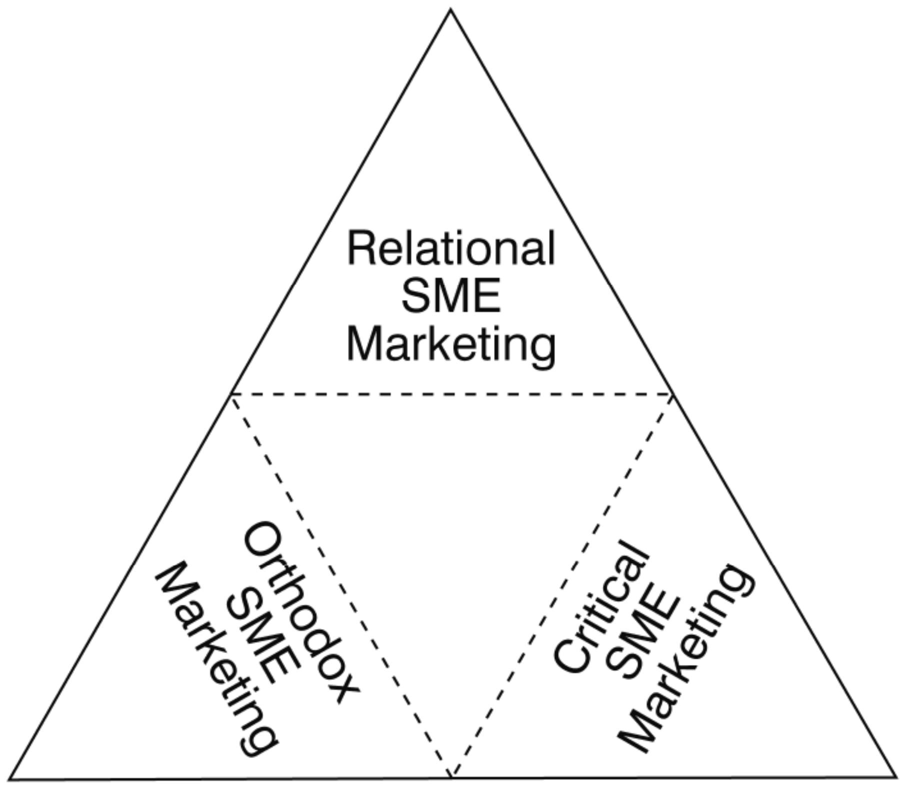

Figure 7.1 The ROC SME Marketing Schema. Source: Constructed by the Author 2007.

It is clear from the discussion above that **SME marketing is an acceptable notion (theme 1)** to all participants in this study and this is embedded in the literature reviewed. Having established this, the discussion then moved on to the relationship between relational, orthodox and critical SME marketing.

The ROC schema and themes 2, 6, and 7

It is, then, clear that **SME marketing is much more than the 4Ps (theme 2)**. It can be seen from the discussion above that transferring the orthodox modernist models was recognised as a problem in the SME context. Opportunity and innovation are drivers of SME owner-managers motivations and not the often-assumed customer needs. Theme 2 pointed the way toward relational and critical marketing and management. It became clear that **SME marketing is infused with relational perspectives (theme 6).** There is no attempt that I can see in the research texts here to subvert this reasoning. Networking featured strongly in this study as part of the business but also the marketing effort. The discussion also makes clear that **Marketing is about people not science, art or postmodern debate (Theme 7).** There is something relating to critical management from most of the participants in this study and this is to do with people. This is not surprising, at least with the SME principals, considering the deeper and richer reasons for setting up and working in an SME in the first place. The organic approach to management and SME marketing being directed by the culture of the organisation suggests the potential for orthodox marketing being entwined with both relational and critical marketing.

The SME marketing ETD context and themes 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9

The contextualisation and application of marketing is part of the rationale of the thesis. The application in this case, as discussed above, was to ETD. It can be seen in the discussion that **SME marketing ETD has at least three stakeholders with ETD needs (theme 3)**. The discussion entered into areas such as risk reduction and consolidation, training standards, skills, qualifications and life styles of owner-managers. It can also be seen that **Basic functional and technical skills are not enough (theme 4)** to fulfil the needs of SMEs. Issues such as size matters when considering type of skills, continuing self-development and a social element added to experiential learning and the importance of networks were clearly part of the discussion on skills. Also included in the contextualized application were issues on flexible approaches to ETD provision in terms of curriculum content. Therefore, it can be seen that **The SME marketing curriculum needs horses for courses (theme 5).** This includes the rather paradoxical situation around the curriculum for SME marketing. For example, there is a call to keep SME marketing simple with the 4P approach used to help understand basic marketing yet there is a strong sense of a need to go beyond the basics and to understand better cultural and ethical issues. As expected in any context and application, a great deal of detail can be seen in this study, which suggests that **There are many interpretations of ETD in SME-land (theme 8).** In the discussion above there is concern for qualifications and competencies, problems with and doubts about the relevancy of competency-based qualifications like NVQs and concern for benefits, delivery methods and lack of senior management qualifications. It can therefore be seen in the discussion that **ETD can be delivered but there are many and changing ways to delivery (theme 9).** Issues such as an increasingly complex learning environment with many modes of delivery, resource constraints and measurement of outcomes are important. The discussion took in concerns about the use of the Internet, social learning (for example through networking) and more personal approaches such as mentoring and coaching.

The ROC SME marketing schema can be applied to the context of SME marketing ETD that becomes the fourth plane of the tetrahedron. This becomes the base plane as depicted in figure 7.2 below.

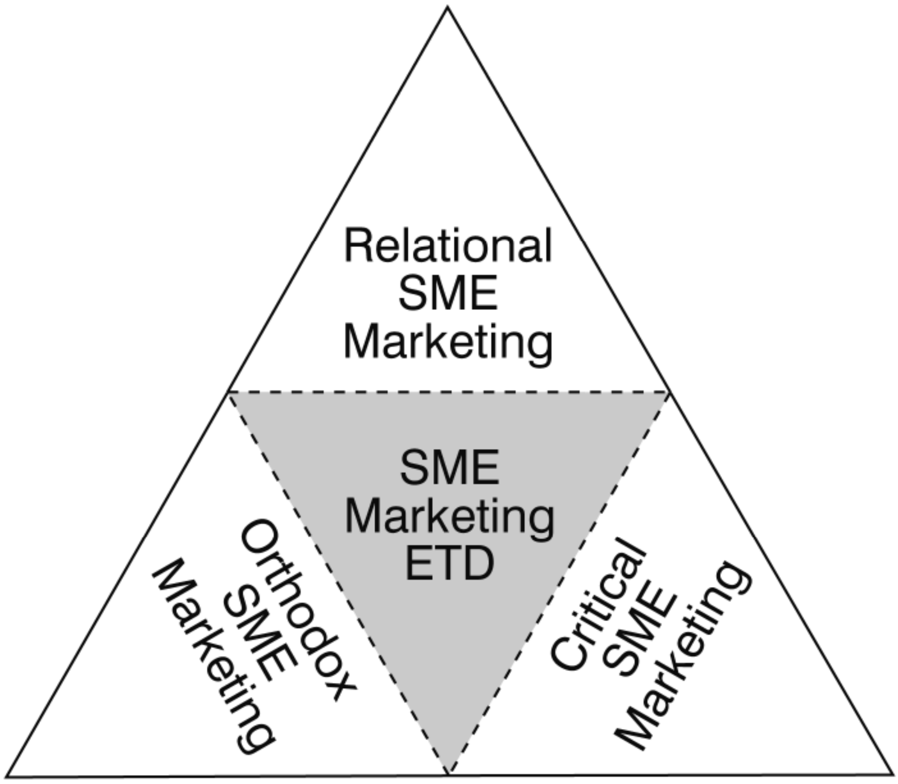

Figure 7.2. The ROC SME Marketing Schema with ETD Context Base Plane. Source: Constructed by the Author 2007.

Presented immediately below are the details of the ROC SME marketing schema and ETD context.

Details of the ROC SME marketing schema and ETD context

As suggested in the above, each of the three paradigms of relational, orthodox and critical marketing have been brought together to form the ROC SME marketing schema that can be applied to particular contexts. The key issues that emerge from the study are contained within each of the three planes but also on the interfaces and in the SME ETD context or base plane. The details of this now follow.

The relational SME marketing plane

People, behaviour and managing relationships

People are viewed differently in relationships and behaviour is more complex than in big companies in the sense that in the SME there is more multi-tasking. SMEs are less likely to have functional specialists. Industry sector norms are conformed to and shared values can be the foundation of partnerships and alliances. Relationship friendliness and power asymmetry need to be managed. Networking is facilitated through interpersonal communication and word-of-mouth (WOM).

Outcomes of relationships

There is innovation and opportunity through relationships that might not otherwise happen. The SME can get closer to the customer cost-effectively through relationships. There is symbiosis between the business and network members that gives added advantage. Marketing research should include researching relationships rather than conventional market research on, for example, size of the market. Knowledge building can happen through relationships, especially networking.

Mechanics of relationships

Language is different in relationships from when the SME operates independently. Trustworthiness, responsibility and safety are important. Tight budgets mean networks and relationships are a necessity for SMEs.

Barriers to relationships

There is transaction-relationship tension. SMEs need to take a longer-term view and build relationships, for example through networking and resist the urge to be short term and immediate in transactional terms. SMEs have a more limited customer base than bigger companies. This can be an advantage to SMEs but is a limiting factor on opportunities to build relationships, whether these are formal partnerships or alliances or informal groupings or gatherings.

The orthodox SME marketing plane

The marketing mix (4Ps)

With SMEs the 4Ps are obvious and in the background not the foreground. The basic model might be useful for training for start-up situations (but not growth businesses) to teach basic marketing. Ps extensions are meaningless and even absurd, especially in SME marketing. The use of these devices benefits trainers not SMEs.

Marketing management

A limited number of owner-managers and managers results in no distinct marketing management function, especially in smaller firms. The perception is that orthodox marketing is for bigger businesses. Mechanistic approaches to marketing are inappropriate to SMEs that have haphazard and unstructured marketing planning, if they plan at all and SME owner-managers dislike planning ahead. There is more of a 'spider's web' approach where SME business life is not focussed on marketing problems and there is a strong sense of risk reduction.

Other orthodox marketing models

Models such as the BCG Matrix and the Theory of the Product Life Cycle have no apparent meaning to SMEs. However, this could be to do with the size of the business and like the 4P model, some application could be possible but not necessarily in the way orthodox marketing intended. SMEs are opportunity oriented and with some SMEs, the diffusion of innovations might be of benefit.

The critical SME marketing plane

People

In SMEs, behaviour is more cross-functional than in bigger companies and this is linked to a spectrum of choice between business growth and lifestyle choice decisions. There is a greater chance that SMEs are people-centred and not 'psychic prisons' that are much more likely to exist in big organisations. The realisation of human interests and the management rather than control of people is linked to the idea that people are the personality of the business, that people are the brand. Marketing is a people thing and leadership can be fostered through critical marketing. In SMEs, there are socially defined ends, meanings, and recognition of a life world of power relations. SMEs understand metaphors of machine and organism in managerial terms and the notion of the manager as technicist (unit of labour) in opposition to critical reasoning that involves liberation, emancipation and democracy. There is a need to tap into this spectrum since at certain points dictat is necessary. This is part of SME flexibility.

Ethics and practice

In SMEs there is a need for innovation and opportunity that is the transforming metaphor for business development and growth. There is a dependency on owner-manager or a small number of directors and not functional specialists. There is a preference for risk reduction in SMEs and this is linked to social responsibility and safety. Owner managers should be conscious of issues involving gender, race, ecology, morality and ethics, not focus on narrow functionalism. There is a possible use for a 'Kite Mark' equivalent for ethical practice. However, with some SMEs there may be resistance to anything that does not appear to benefit the business. This could be considered myopic or a deliberate life style choice.

Postmodernism

There are postmodern SME businesses and products in this study, but no apparent postmodern SME marketing. However, this looks to be changing. Certain types of networks are associated with postmodernism (see Critical/Relational interface).

Mechanics

Marketing is an organisational thing that can enhance reputation and show off professionalism if done well. Since markets are socially constructed, SMEs have an advantage in terms of their flexibility and manoeuvrability.

The relational/orthodox interface

SMEs can achieve sustainable competitive advantage from partnerships and alliances. The move from exchange to transaction gives SMEs a better chance of avoiding one-sided relationships and achieving mutually beneficial relationships. SMEs should research relationships and gain an understanding of networks and networking for enlightenment rather than formal marketing research. With SMEs, orthodox marketing tools such as advertising are not well received. Relationships are part of integrated marketing where partnerships and alliances can have a long-term orientation in order to achieve value creation and sustainable competitive advantage.

The orthodox/critical interface

The SME should consider critical ideas around business based on ethics and marketing practices. People (but not in a fifth P kind of way) coupled with innovation and opportunity (and not 4Ps-type approaches), which is the transforming metaphor that helps SMEs develop and grow. Orthodox marketing is descriptive not predictive and the narrow functional focus needs to be broadened into fair trade, ethical issues, gender issues i.e. human not mechanical. The SME has personality derived from its people and this defines the business as a brand. Critical marketing is necessary because of the shortfall in orthodox marketing approaches.

The critical/relational interface

Small firms grow organically where there is a symbiosis between business and networking. People and relationships, not one-off sales, are important to SMEs. The fit of the business is not necessarily to do with products but with collaborations through commonalities. SMEs should foster good relationships with the community or communities in which it operates. Communities of practice are of great importance. This includes networks and networking via virtual realities on the Internet and intranets, especially as boundaries between organisations and customers and other organisations blur.

The ROC interface

Here an integrated holistic approach to relationship marketing that can help join critical marketing and orthodox marketing is advocated. For example, critical issues such as professionalism, the ethical nature of the business and relationships, some form of alliance and impact on reputation are factors that bring together the three paradigms.

The SME marketing ETD context base plane

Skills and competencies

In SMEs, there is a dependency on a small number of manager competencies, in comparison with larger organisations. Competence-based accreditation such as NVQs is not attractive to SMEs yet MTD is required for survival. SME managers, if they are to look at qualifications at all, would prefer something like an MBA not NVQs. Different skills exist. Some are termed ordinary or administrative and others entrepreneurial and managerial. There is a need for SMEs to develop higher order skills that allow for innovation and creativity. SMEs need to be adaptive to graft different skills together. The transfer of entrepreneurial skills into ordinary businesses is possible and this is facilitated by, for example, business clubs, mentoring or business angels. Thinking critically, critical reflection and thinking skills need developing. These should be encouraged in SME employees of all levels. There should be a fusion of skills and skills levels. SMEs need higher order skills for development and growth. There is a need to develop transferable personal skills for knowledge and understanding.

Training and trainers

SME training needs to be innovative. Trainers need to have real and relevant business experience. Training to network is an attractive proposition but difficult to achieve. SMEs might have to accept that some people cannot be trained. There may be a need to buy in skills through, for example, consultancy. There should be an ‘umbilical cord’ attached to trainees and trainers should achieve training objectives. Training is beneficial but might not be necessary for business success.

Learning

Social learning and communities of practice are an important part of SME activity. Such activity consists of things like networking, business clubs and guest speakers. Experiential learning and social influence, social interaction and the ability to work with others are central to SME learning. SMEs need real learning environments. In part, SMEs face complex learning environments where learning is more than knowledge transfer or mere training. SMEs need to 'learn how to learn' and exploit motivations in learning. SMEs can transfer ideas from business networks. Individuals need to become proactive rather than reactive learners. A mix of formal and informal learning is achievable. SMEs need to understand that wider knowledge allows deeper and more meaningful thinking and the ability to ask questions that are more searching.

Development

The individual should be developed in order to develop the business. However, some SMEs do not want to grow and develop, this being linked to lifestyle choice. SMEs that wish to grow need to develop leaders.

Delivery

Combinations of delivery method, including formal and informal methods, should be considered in order to deliver information and knowledge effectively and efficiently. Mentoring can help provide leadership and an impartial one-to-one sounding board. Coaching diagnoses what is on the battlefield for negotiation, interpersonal and higher order managerial skills. Information and knowledge search and transference can be achieved via conferences, professional bodies and agencies. SMEs might be tempted by the cheapest, easiest, and quickest methods. This might not meet real needs or enhance what the business offers. Providers should strive for greater creativity and innovation in delivery. Social delivery via business clubs with possibilities around guest speakers, networking or simply socialising can be good for SMEs. On-line learning is not necessarily anti-social but it will never be touchy feely. Experiential delivery through practice, apprenticeship or knowledge transfer programmes should be considered, as should a mix of traditional and experiential delivery in the workplace and on the job.

Measurement

Resource constraints mean that cost-effectiveness is always on the SME agenda. There should therefore be measurement of outcomes, progress and objectives. The difficulties in measuring more qualitative outcomes should be recognised. SME support must be relevant to day-to-day performance.

Chapter summary

This chapter has been a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature. Following on from the previous chapter, where nine themes with supporting discourses emerged. The nine themes were then utilised as a framework for discussion. A brief description of the ROC SME marketing schema and the ETD application then followed and this included details of the ROC SME marketing schema in terms of the content of the planes and interfaces. It also included details of the ETD application. The next chapter is the final, concluding chapter of the thesis that includes a summation of the original contribution of the thesis, reflections and implications for future research.

CHAPTER EIGHT - CONCLUSIONS: ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION, REFLECTIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

SME marketing and related ETD will be understood further and better through this thesis. In the thesis, I set out to review the existing works in the field of orthodox, relationship and critical marketing. This includes postmodern marketing, the work of the Critical Theorists and their impact on management and marketing as well as contemporary work in the entrepreneurial and SME marketing fields. I began this study in the knowledge that orthodox and relationship marketing would be considerations for educators, trainers and developers when dealing with SME clients. I had always felt there was more that could be added and my interest in marketing philosophy and the marketing as science/art debate had made me aware of the role played by marketing in society inherent in the Frankfurt School. This led me to consider Critical Theory as a third strand of thought and knowledge. I knew this was not the only potential direction but wanted to express my own way of 'seeing' marketing. In order to make sense of this ambition I also knew that a context was needed to make the task a manageable one. My experience in industry had led me from being a marketer in multinationals to the small business world where my concerns over the nature of my specialism were heightened over time as an SME ETD person then an academic.

A key issue was always going to be the nature of the research that would be employed. I had wanted to move away from my positivist leanings and to engage with a new and very different (for me) research experience that would take me further down the road of discovery that is my journey. In my bid to decipher the fourteen research texts, I used a form of Discourse Analysis as an analytical tool. I formulated nine themes that contained the emergent discourses to meet the objectives and research question as proposed in the introduction to the thesis. In short, this is a new way of seeing SME marketing that involves a set of concepts that are more sustainable and meaningful than those provided by marketing orthodoxy or relationship marketing alone.

I felt it was necessary to reflect on all of this, both in terms of my journey and in terms of methodological choices. This includes lessons learnt along the way, work published through conference proceedings and work in the pipeline that includes some of my own implications for future research.

Aims, objectives and research question in relation to contribution to theory

Aims and research question

The overall aim of the thesis is to provide an original contribution through a new way of 'seeing' marketing that is distinctly different to the orthodox discourse developed in much larger enterprises over time. In this sense, the aim is to contribute to the emerging set of concepts that are more sustainable and meaningful within SME marketing and therefore are able to contribute toward SME ETD and the work of educators, trainer and developers. The results of the thesis inform thinking on a range of SME marketing issues and issues of SME ETD to more subject-specific areas such as marketing communications, word-of-mouth or networking. There is, therefore, an assumption here that marketing as shaped over time by large corporations offers an inappropriate set of models and frameworks to many other contexts and in particular that of the SME owner-manager. The key research question is how SME and ETD participants 'see' marketing and what impact this might have on the provision of ETD in the SME context.

Objectives and original contribution to theory

At the end of chapter seven the emergent themes and discussion were linked to the SME marketing ROC schema and the ETD context and the details (derived from the themes and discourse as presented in chapter six and discussed in chapter seven) of the schema and its application to ETD were explained.

Ontology and epistemology

The thesis was set up as my journey to explore views put forward by the ontology of the chosen context in contrast to other marketing discourses, as well as the epistemological implications of any philosophical stances in marketing. The intent also was to develop a methodology for use in the stated context and apply this methodology within this context. This has been met and it can be said with some certainty that SME marketing is an acceptable notion to all participants in this study and is embedded in the literature reviewed and this thesis therefore contributes towards this understanding.

The ROC SME marketing schema

The objective to explore the notion that modernist marketing orthodoxy is inappropriate to the SME context and to consider certain others - relationship marketing, and critical marketing – and what they have to offer was achieved. This included consideration of the consequent marketing ‘way of seeing’, whether this is significantly different in this context and whether marketing theory and practice is significantly different. This study does indeed indicate that orthodox marketing models and theories do not automatically transfer to the SME context. However, aspects of this orthodoxy are extant in the SME world.

In this thesis there is an assumed existence of a marketing continuum, which allows a variety of forms of or approaches to marketing that are not mutually exclusive. The various approaches are seen as options that reflect the changing face of marketing, the implementation of which has implications for the practitioner, especially since customers have awakened to their new found power and control. Relationships, for example, exist in all organisations, large and small. Goods and services cannot be separated and treated differently. All efforts become part of a marketing continuum that allows the marketing practitioner considerable flexibility to use all or part of it and to enter it when the practitioner feels like it, depending upon resources and other circumstances.

The strength of influence of relational marketing and management aspects is clearly important. Networking for various reasons, including to research and to market, takes on a particular relevance in SME activities. Other aspects that emerged in this study can be described as critical and part of what has been coined critical marketing. At the centre of this are people. This has an effect on the nature of SME marketing but also on how to manage people in SMEs. There are potentially other influences but these three, relational, orthodox and critical, can be clearly seen in this study, as can be the links between each on the interfaces and on the interface of all three.

The SME ETD context

This thesis had an objective to consider whether or not there is a new requirement to meet a different set of ETD needs. This includes consideration of a different kind of subject matter. The thesis also sought to focus on ETD and reflect on the ramifications of this for future ETD within the SME context under study. Marketing in the SME context appears more dynamic and much more of a people thing. This involves relationships and networks as well as more critical issues such as ethical considerations. There are issues around skills and competencies for training and for trainers. Learning, development, delivery and measurement needs are confirmed and new issues are raised.

The objectives set out in the introduction to the thesis have been achieved and the research question answered. My central, original contribution is summarised in figure 8.1 below.

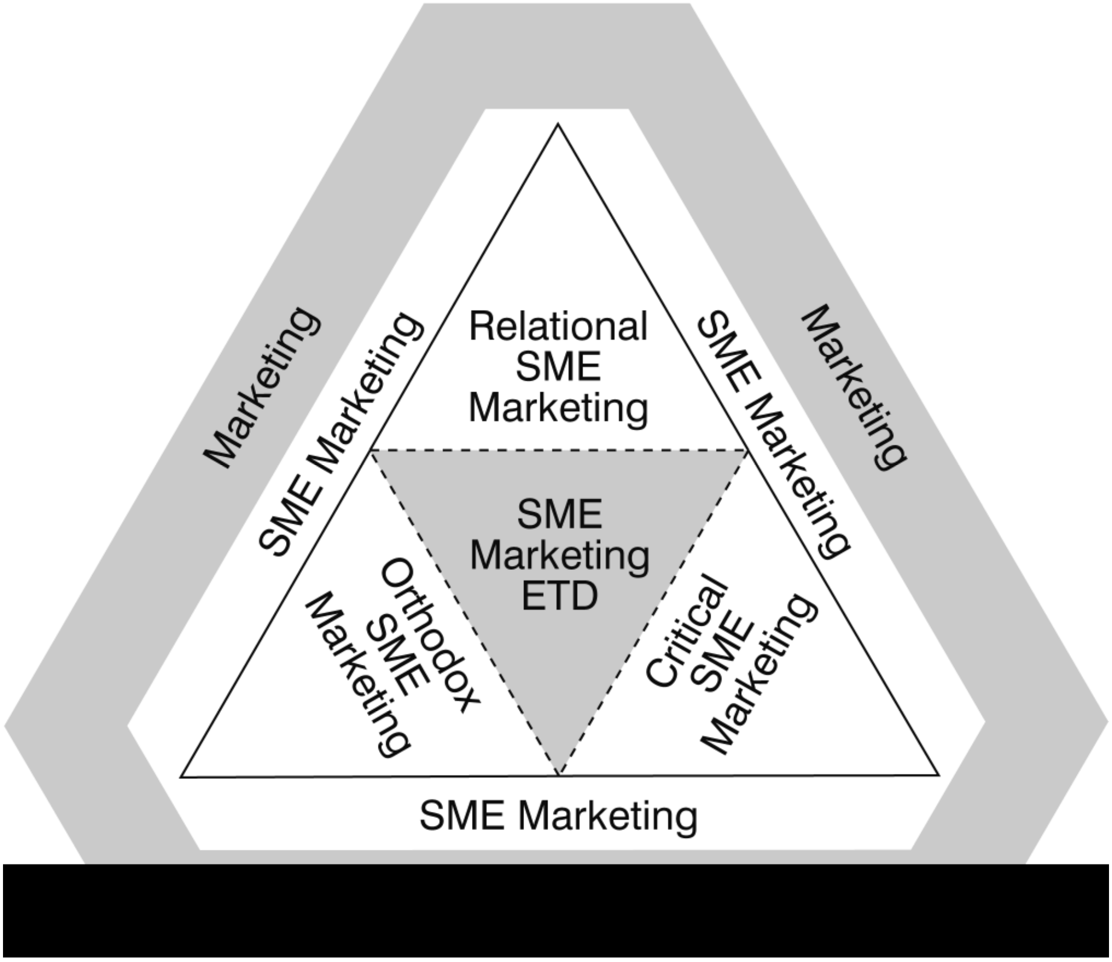

Figure 8.1. The ROC SME marketing schema as part of marketing. Source: Constructed by the author, 2007.

The ROC SME marketing schema is central to the contribution of this thesis to SME marketing theory and practice. The content inside the planes and on the interfaces, detailed in the previous chapter, informs SME and ETD people on issues of SME marketing. This should be considered before any ETD programmes and materials are developed.

Reflections

Constructing this thesis in the way that I have has taught me valuable lessons. The first is that reflexivity should be a continuous practice. The reflexive process involves introspection and a deeper look at things such as thoughts and emotions. Being reflective is not the same as being reflexive. Reflexive practice in a particular kind of management research is only part of my learning. There are personal and methodological lessons that I feel are worthy of consideration. This fits in with the argument of this thesis that is one of the ‘ways of seeing’ marketing.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves reflecting on the research, an engagement with critical appraisal of one’s own practice and seeking to understand how the research process impacts on outcomes. Reflexivity is about participating and dialogue (Johnson and Duberley, 2003). For example, the researcher should be aware of how a particular interpretation of data has been made or how underlying assumptions have been exposed. Hackley (1998:129) notes that reflexivity is a necessary feature of qualitative research and ‘is woven into the text’ as an acknowledgement of the researcher’s presence and influence on the interview. Sandelowski and Borroso (2002:222) have a stronger view, suggesting that reflexivity ‘is a hallmark of excellent qualitative research’ which allows the researcher to reflect inward and outward. Johnson and Duberley (2003) suggest that poor research practices will be the result if unexamined metatheoretical commitments are made. For Hackley it is a social constructionist perspective that ‘does not objectify research subjects: it does not seek to quantify data and it does not apply pre-conceived categories within which to group the data’ (Hackley, 1998:129). Researchers are in a strong position to say what knowledge is and what it is not. Reflexivity facilitates the meeting of the researcher’s ‘intellectual responsibility’ (Johnson and Duberley, 2003:1280).

The object, for Roth and Breuer (2003:4), ‘cannot be understood independent of the researcher (subject) and is therefore, and dialectically so, tied up with him/her’. Meaning is upheld and sustained through interviews reflecting the socially organized and personally valued self, resulting in the structure of meaning being constituted by a participant within a social process. This is an ideologically different standpoint from that of the positivist and therefore is a different way of management intervention rather than conventional ‘managerialism’. The study in this thesis is engaged in interpretations of qualitative aspects of participants experience and therefore is not ideologically neutral. Outcomes are founded on a social world of meaning via reflexive understanding of how meaning is constituted in that particular social world.

Reflexivity should add value. It is often seen as the critical opposite of universalism and objectivism (Bryans, Mavin and Waring, 2002). Reflexivity is associated with postmodernism and poststructuralism since it involves social, political, linguistic and other issues in a social context (Adkins, 2002). There are a number of issues that being reflexive can help with. For example there is an obvious need to address the issue of inclusion/exclusion of data, i.e., why some data are included and why others are left out (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In addition, reflexivity can be seen in relation to the research context with participants and to the data produced, calling for a critical examination and re-examination of all that is done by the researcher as a person or actor involved (Pels, 2000). In a practical way, Pels recommends that researchers further ask informants to reflect on their role and what has been said in the research transcript. Pels also recommends that researchers engage with others by getting them to reinterpret the presentation of the research. In this thesis, I have engaged with both of these recommendations as part of my application of reflexivity to the thesis construction process. I also took note of Adkins' (2002) comments on the relationship between known research and the known informant and those of Pels (2000) who is interested in what is known about the knower who is dealing in autobiography and the researcher who will take this into the realm of biography.

I, researcher

In this thesis I have selected two types of reflexivity that I feel when combined suit the thesis. Epistemic and methodological reflexivity were chosen because the former challenges me to confront myself as researcher, to challenge my belief system and to examine and test assumptions and predispositions. This involves critical thinking and the unearthing of hidden assumptions through epistemic reflexivity. The latter challenges me to think about the chosen methodology and what alternatives might have been employed. The intent is to move from unconscious to conscious and tacit to explicit (Johnson and Duberley, 2003) via these challenges. It is possible therefore to split methodology from epistemology, theorise different levels of participation in the research and research process and therefore build different forms of reflexivity into the research process and allow the thematisation of reflexivity (Lynch, 2000).

Epistemic reflexivity. Bryans, Mavin and Waring (2002, after Johnson and Duberley, 2000) suggest this involves the researcher's own historical biography. It involves consciously thinking about thinking and looking for alternatives (Johnson and Cassell, 2001). This involves self-knowledge but also a sense of belonging and honesty regarding one's position and behaviour in the world. A similar sentiment is expressed by Adkins (2002:334) as in self-reflexivity 'being where self-consciousness, the focus on self-examination of the researcher and author is an expression of the relationship between text and reader being destabilized'. Fay (1987) offers up confrontation as an expression of the same and Johnson and Duberley (2003:1281) suggest that reflexivity confronts circularity of 'epistemological and ontological issues' and epistemic reflexivity in particular confronts and questions taken for granted assumptions and sensitises us to the existence of an array of problems. There is an attempt to represent more accurately reality where the researcher's own social experiences and assumptions are challenged. Therefore, what the researcher thinks about thinking, about excavating, articulating, evaluating and transforming is important. Resilience, however, is to be expected because epistemic reflexivity includes taken for granted views. My own experiences had led to the ideas behind the thesis in the first place. I created a form of metatheoretical examination of presumptions in the chosen field of study (Johnson and Duberley, 2003). I sought to challenge assumptions, to 'excavate', to 'articulate', certainly to 'evaluate' and I was looking to offer a new way of seeing in my chosen field. I have reflected on my social location i.e. myself as a subjective individual (Czarniawska, 1998, Johnson and Duberley, 2003). This includes me being very comfortable with marketing and marketing for SMEs. I work in a university as an academic but had entered the old Newcastle Polytechnic as marketing adviser and trainer to SMEs and start up businesses in the non-academic Small Business Unit. This was after a number of years in different industry sectors, mostly with multinational corporations at first. Later I began working with SMEs through association with one of the EDAs and my own consultancy that was effectively a small business.

Obtaining the interviews was relatively easy. As discussed earlier in the thesis, there is a strong network of SMEs and support for SMEs in the North East and referrals were available for more participants if I wanted them. However, with the SME participants in particular their 'active voice' might have been rather more active, although the feeling I got was that they had done the business (the interview) and it was over so why go back to it, even though all participants promised they would at the time. I also detected a hint of 'I, academic', despite having the credentials with both types of participant, having been both a small business and an ETD type. I still felt a little stigmatised by this as I had done while an ETD type in the 1980s. I was happy to conduct the interviews at the participants' convenience and in terms of what I was doing there was no difference conducting an interview in a pub than in an office. I recognised my own position. Obtaining informed consent involved telling participants that I had to abide by Northumbria University's Ethics in Research and Consultancy Policy. We all potentially carry baggage and bring it with us. Participants are likely to bring epistemological and political baggage (Johnson and Duberley, 2003). Practicing reflexivity can help mitigate this since

> "the key role of epistemic reflexivity is to negate the world as an objectively accessible social reality and denaturalise hegemonic accounts by exposing their modes of social organisation and reproduction".
>
> (Johnson and Duberley, 2003:1289).

Johnson and Duberley (2003:1290) go on to suggest that epistemic reflexivity engenders socially constructed self-understandings. It is a resource that helps researchers 'recognise their own creative inputs and surfaces the ethical priorities which construct what we know about management' (Johnson and Duberley, 2003:1292).

Methodological reflexivity. Lynch (2000:29) suggests there are 'several variants of methodological reflexivity' which 'is widely advocated …what any given text means by reflexivity often depends upon the method it espouses'. For Lynch (2000) this involves philosophical self-reflection and methodological self-consciousness and self-criticism. Bryman and Cassell (2006:45) point out that writers like Lynch are critical of the use of methodological reflexivity because of its 'diffuseness and multiple meanings'.

In this thesis, it is thought to be worthwhile to engage with methodological reflexivity to help explain and support choices that were made and reasons for them as opposed to alternatives. It is acknowledged that there are limitations to this and a key danger might be that methodological reflexivity dwells on technical aspects of research rather than the aforementioned metatheoretical assumptions. Rather than just reflecting on the rules of the game, 'methodological reflexivity helps to make the moves within the game better' (Johnson and Duberley, 2003:1284).

In this thesis, I have followed the advice of Alvesson and Scoldberg (2000:5). I started in a 'sceptical way', looking at how marketing realities function. I used well thought out excerpts as an important basis for knowledge generation that opens rather than closes. I sought opportunities for understanding rather than establishing the truth. In addition, from the start of this thesis, I have taken an interpretive approach. The decision to take a Discourse Analysis approach to analysis as discussed in chapter five demonstrates my willingness to embrace a radically different way, for me, to look at data. As the work of this thesis is not of a positivist orientation and the stance taken is interpretivist, it was expected that I as researcher (although experienced in research, SMEs and as a marketing practitioner), as participant in the interview and subsequent activities, would clearly have an effect on the process. Not only does this kind of research demand awareness of this participation but inevitably a sense of reflexivity.

Methodological reflexivity does feature in this thesis, in the sense that I did reflect on my behaviour in a number of ways. For example, my engagement with the methodology of this thesis is clear to me. I kept asking myself 'why do it this way?' and reminding myself why I had wanted to move away from the positivist stance. Once I had decided on the SSI as the primary contact method I did change probing (to avoid rambling) and allow the SSI guide to mutate as the interviews progressed and allow co-construction. As the analysis wore on and the process of pulling the strands of the thesis progressed, I was constantly thinking about what I might have overlooked and whether things could be done differently. For example, some form of unstructured instrument or research diary could have been devised but these for now remain part of my implications for future research. However, I was confident with the SSI and even more so as the interviews progressed and I could feel the quality of the experience that included letting the participants help set the agenda where some of the items were co-constructed.

The choice of a qualitative rather than quantitative research tool and the employment of Discourse Analysis were important decisions. Other aspects such as the nature of the sample and its size can be reflected on, as can be good practice such as allowing participants an active voice (Acker, Barry and Esseveld, 1991). By choosing Discourse Analysis, I, for the first time, got involved with biographical narrative. As Roth and Breuer (2003:2, after Derrida, 1988) point out, 'researchers formed in the hermeneutic tradition know that every text lends itself to multiple reading, a situation that is embodied by the nature of the sign' and that the 'process may differ from reader to reader'. Crotty (1998) sees different worlds constituting different ways of knowing and therefore meanings and entities that are defined by this.

I was not formed in the hermeneutic tradition but I had been interested in 'ways of seeing' ever since I began studying art history as a hobby. I had come across a television series on the politicisation of art and painting in particular and had made a connection to my specialism. I wanted my journey to be as transparent as possible and to show that my social constructivism was genuine. I genuinely was seeking to understand and to discover a new way of seeing my specialism. As an experienced interviewer the how, what, where and when of interviewing posed no problems and I was happy that the voices I had were ample as discussed in chapter five. Paradoxically my credentials as researcher (from a locally well-known university and business school) appeared to be very acceptable to participants. This underscores the importance of academia in certain respects. As an inexperienced Discourse Analyst, I did struggle at first to find the kind of DA that would fit with the research question and objectives of the thesis. In this regard, the first interview became a sharp learning curve as to what was appropriate and what was not. Again though there are aspects of DA that are part of the implications for future research.

Reflexive practice in management research - lessons for a journeyman

From the very start, I had built into the thesis a sense of reflexivity. The dilemma I faced was a move from taking a positive stance to a subjective one. The literature on methodology seemed to me to be sending out mixed signals. I had at first thought that a judging panel would be useful but some of the literature suggested that the kind of research in this thesis could be autonomous (for example Ardley, 2005). I moved to this position in contrast to Pels (2000) who advocates other involvement. Despite feeling that the research in this thesis was trustworthy, I provided some research texts and some of my work on the themes and supporting discourses to two colleagues who I knew would have the desired qualities to do a similar job as I could in terms of being a researcher. In effect, I asked them to judge whether they felt that my interpretations of the research texts were in line with what they would have done. In other words, I asked them to interpret the data, judge my interpretation of the data (Pels, 2000), and reassure me that I had carried this out ‘correctly’. I had this in mind from the start and built it in to the methodology chapter. Both judges were willing to say that they indeed agreed with my interpretations. I decided to do this and accept Pels’ notion of reinterpretation. This, I feel, enhanced the trustworthiness of my research.

I am not claiming any sort of generalisability. In this thesis I believe in a social constructivist approach to knowledge and part of the reasoning behind the entire thesis is that I did not feel that large surveys or a simple, ‘five bar gate’ approach to analysis of interview data would provide answers to my questions. Knowledge is situated uniquely to this research; therefore, I am not seeking reliability and replication. Rather, I did seek the voices of relevant people about their subjective experiences, the contribution being original knowledge and insights into knowledge creation.

Some of my publications that have resonance with the research in this thesis predate registration of the PhD. Of course, this is part of the journey. It started with a paper to the old National Small Firms Policy and Research Conference at Gleneagles (1986) on small firm marketing extension programmes. In 1987, a paper on enterprise training and development was presented to the same conference at Cranfield. In 1988 a paper on Welsh further and higher education institutions and their attitudes towards enterprise training was presented to the same conference at Cardiff. In 1989, I received an MPhil at Newcastle University that involved research on the education and training needs of small business owner-managers. Between 1996 and 2001, I was involved with the arts marketing and arts tourism marketing contexts with papers to the Academy of Marketing at Strathclyde (1996), the International Tourism and Culture Conference at Northumbria (1996), the Academy of Marketing Conference at

Manchester (1997) and a journal article followed in 2001. Also in 1996, I presented papers to the Academy of marketing Conference at Strathclyde on students learning in a North East-based SME, on advertising as art, and on marketing and semiotics. In 1997, I presented a paper on marketing philosophy at the Marketing Illuminations Spectacular Conference in Belfast and at the Academy of Marketing Conference (on marketing and humanitarian causes) at Manchester (1997). In 1998, I presented papers to the Academy of Marketing Conference at Sheffield on marketing communications and charities, marketing communications and systems thinking, semiotics and relationship marketing and branding and sponsorship. In 1999, I was nominated for a track prize at the Academy of Marketing Conference held at the University of Stirling for a paper on marketing in Middle Eastern SMEs. I also presented a paper at Stirling on the humanitarian cause related marketing and sponsorship context. A paper based on the PhD proposal was accepted by the Academy of Marketing the following year (2000) at the University of Derby on small firms' marketing education and training needs and marketing practice. I was nominated again for a track prize and this time, to my delight, I won and this boosted my confidence. At the same conference, I presented papers on relationship marketing and branding, relationship marketing and sponsorship and finally the Arab management paradigm. At the Academy of Marketing Conference in 2001 at Cardiff, I presented papers on semiotics and the tourism context and on the SME BtoB context.

During 2002, I was involved with the Academy of Marketing Special Interest Group on the Marketing/Entrepreneurship Interface at Oxford Brookes that culminated in a collaborative paper on contextual marketing presented at the American Marketing Association Symposium at San Diego by one of my co-collaborators. In the same year, I presented a paper based on some of my PhD work to the International Small Business and Entrepreneurship Conference at Brighton. Another paper on contextual marketing was presented by one of my SIG co-collaborators at the Academy of Marketing SIG at Gloucester.

I suspended the PhD during 2003-4 in order to finish my book on Marketing Communications Management that was published and available by September 2004 in time for the 2004-5 academic year. By 2005, I had resumed the PhD and a paper on ‘ways of seeing’ BtoB marketing using a form of Discourse Analysis was presented at the Academy of Marking Conference at Dublin. I had labelled this (incorrectly) with a Critical Discourse Analysis title but on reflection see this as part of my journey and I would later reject this for another form of DA. At the same conference, I presented a paper on semiotics and charity sector marketing. This illustrates my interest in contextualised marketing.

Along the way, I have undertaken some teaching on modules that in part at least tries to get students interested in going beyond orthodox and relationship marketing for SMEs. I have sought the views of the students and have had success in changing perspectives as many had orthodoxy as the central model. This change in thinking was good for the students but helped me consolidate thoughts especially on the type of DA that I would apply.

Implications for further research

A final objective that can be found in the introduction to this thesis is to make suggestions for further research in this and other contexts.

On the broadest level, the ROC SME marketing schema is transportable so that instead of marketing ETD for SMEs the schema can be applied to many other contexts. One example would be arts marketing. Other forms of critical study, such as feminism or radical ecology could be added. There could therefore be more than the four planes. This would change the shape of the object and increase the number of planes and interfaces. In this thesis there are the three planes of the ROC schema that are considered from which the avenues stem. There are also the interfaces of the three planes and the point at which all three meet. Then there is the base plane that is the context in which the rest are applied. In this thesis, this is SME marketing ETD. Therefore, many avenues of exploration and discovery emerge from this study.

In addition to the suggestions made immediately above, other areas have potential. First, the research methodology and analysis employed is worthy of further exploration in terms of transportation to other contexts, as suggested above and the employment of other data collection methods such as the unstructured interview could be considered. Second, it is worth noting that management paradigms and culture were considered to be included in the literature review of this thesis. This was eventually rejected, not because of irrelevancy but because although marketing orthodoxy is linked to the American Management Paradigm and relationship marketing to the European Management Paradigm, it was felt that to include this would be too broad a sweep. It is believed though that SME marketing and ETD within these cultural models are worthy of research and study. Third, some form of longitudinal study might reveal aspects of change. Fourth, a more linguistic approach to Critical Discourse Analysis of research texts of SME and ETD participants would be a very fruitful direction. Fifth, it was beyond the scope of this thesis to explore further learning styles in relation to experiential learning and it is believed that in the SME marketing context this is a fertile area for further research. Finally, deeper comparative study could be made between ETD SME perspectives and between SMEs and larger enterprises.

Chapter summary

This chapter sees my journey into SME marketing ETD come to an end. I have explained my approach to and belief in the need for reflexivity. I have demonstrated the kinds of reflexivity (both epistemic and methodological) that dominated my thinking and reflexive practice in the particular kind of management research that has been conducted during the creation of this thesis. This includes issues discussed in chapter five of this thesis around choice of methodology, data collection method and data analysis method. I have published material throughout the journey and have considered the avenues of further discovery including the transportability of this research to other contexts, to build upon insights generated. This research contributes to the understanding of SME marketing ETD. Furthermore, by conceptualising and formulating the ROC SME marketing schema and fusing the three paradigms together, understanding of each of the paradigms in the context under study is enhanced. I am now at a point where another journey is about to start. Now that the burden of constructing this thesis has been lifted I have been able to assess the contribution that it offers and commence my new journey that includes dissemination of outputs, the first of which will involve an article on rethinking small business research.

APPENDIX I - THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE/GUIDE

Classification data

Company Name:
Telephone Number:
Ownership/legal status:
Age of current business:
Number of employees/turnover:
Description of/nature of business:
Organisation/structure:
Status/position of participant:
Nature of business/work experience:
Years of business experience:
Gender:
Age:

Preamble

You can rest assured this research is being conducted in the strictest of confidence. I am a member of the Market Research Society (MRS), the Academy of Marketing (AM) and the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM). I have to abide by the Northumbria University's ethics in research and consultancy policy. I can therefore also assure you of anonymity. One of the things I want to do is to explore your views on what has been happening in marketing and to get your reaction to some questions via personal interview in the first instance. Therefore, this is all about business and marketing planning, products, customers, competition, suppliers, key customers, important suppliers, finding customers – the usual things associated with marketing. However, it is also about relationships, networking, employee relations, and other relevant issues. In short, it is about running a relatively small enterprise and issues that matter that might be seen as internal or external to the organisation. It is about management and marketing but also about education, training and development.

Is there anything else that I can tell you or comment on before we begin the interview proper?

Okay, let's begin

Interview schedule items

Please note these are basic items and were subjected to probing that was potentially different for each interview resulting in co-production of responses between participants and me.

1. When I say the word marketing, what does this mean – how do you view marketing?

2. So, if I say marketing techniques, what does this mean?

3. A key finding in the literature is to do with this transference or not of the marketing mix from the general to other contexts. This advocates that the firm have a marketing concept that has at its core the 4Ps – product, place, promotion and price. What is your own experience of this and other marketing models and theories?

4. In general educational terms the 'what should we teach our students' argument is not new and at least three stakeholders appear to exist i.e. employers, lecturers, students. What is your experience of this in SME and ETD terms?

5. What do you think you would need in any of these roles from marketing?

6. I'm going to read a short passage to you about skills and I would like you to listen then comment on it.

"The argument for the provision of preparation for technical skills misses the idea that has 'vociferous support' in the literature i.e. the incorporation of critical reflection in order to counter the narrow vocationalism in which functional and technical skills

crowd out a critical perspective. The danger is that students will resist anything perceived to be ‘theoretical’ or ‘impractical’ or ‘irrelevant’ and go for the readily served up diet of things that can be immediately applied (regardless of depth of benefit). At the same time the very concepts from sociology, psychology etc. that are central to a critical perspective on management are rejected”.
Any comment?

7. Some commentators argue for the use of things such as ethics, power, sexual politics etc. to be taught or included in marketing textbooks or ETD programmes, others not. What is your view on or experience of this, if any? Are there any marketing education differences between general as opposed to BtoB marketing in your view?

8. Look at this list of topics on the nature of marketing:

- Marketing
- The nature of markets
- Relationship strategies for different markets
- International markets
- Marketing strategy
- Marketing research
- Segmentation
- The marketing mix
- The Internet
- Personal communications
- Sales promotions
- Pricing

What would add or take away from this list in terms of your needs and practices and can you explain why? Can you elaborate on key marketing variables and techniques that you see in your day-to-day business and marketing life?

9. Can you explain what approach to marketing you would favour - a more relational approach to these ideas, the marketing mix approach, a more critical approach or some other approach?

10. Do you consider inter-organizational relationships in day-to-day marketing practice?

If so: What are these relationships like?
If not: Why are no such relationships fostered?

11. Lastly, what do you think of the possibility of having several perspectives on marketing? For example, that marketing involves a form of marketing mix but at the same time incorporates relational perspectives and issues such as ethics or the nature of power in inter-firm marketing. What are your thoughts on this?

APPENDIX II - EXAMPLES OF INFORMED CONSENT

Participant 2 - Ann

PC

Okay, well thanks for...em... granting me...em...this interview. As usual and as we have already discussed you can rest assured that this research is being conducted in the strictest confidence. I am a member of the MRS and the academy of...er...marketing and the chartered institute of marketing and I abide by the professional codes...em...er... of practise anyway and at the University of Northumbria we have a similar if not the same code…em...so you know why I'm here, I'm here to em…er...explore with you your views on what has been happening in marketing, but especially business to business, business to organisational marketing rather… than consumers…em...er... with smaller companies and from the criteria that you've given me your company fits into the SME, Small to Medium Size Enterprise model and it's also product led in the educational specialist equipment field. So this is about business and marketing and planning and products and customers and competition, suppliers, key customers, important suppliers, finding customers – the usual things associated with how I see marketing, but it's also about relationships, networking, employee relations other relevant issues that the way you see it. In …em…short it's about running a relatively small enterprise and issues that matter that might be ***SEEN*** *as internal or external to the organisation. So its about management, but it's about marketing it's also in the end about education training and development because I want to get your views too on the way you see education and training and as it relates to the development of…er... obviously in your case, your business. So if I can just start with asking you to comment; is there* ***ANYTHING*** *else I can tell you about the reasons for the research...er... or comment on before we begin the interview proper.*

Ann

No all of that sounds fine. I think that just about covers what I had understood the purpose of the meeting to be.

PC

Okay…er… (interrupted)

Ann

Would it possible to get a copy of the research when it's finished?

PC

I should explain as well that what I plan to do is to transcribe the tapes. They are absolutely confidential, but in terms of the...er... technique which I didn't want to get into because it would take too long to explain, but basically I'm not giving a massive quantity of interviews. What I'm doing is in depth study of a small number of informants who have agreed to talk to me and I'm using a technique called discourse analysis in the end which rather than me simply analyse responses and make simple categories I'm actually building on the discourse. I'm… it becomes a biography of ***YOU*** *and to get that biography more complete, if you like, the ideas from the* *interview are presented back to you for you to look through and look…er… back at on your own comments and therefore the biography would change er …that's part of it and certainly I don't see any confidentiality issues and anyone taking part in the…er…interviews would probably be able to read extracts of the dissertation at least. Or maybe I'll construct a more readable…em… kind of report that everyone could have that is not…em… an academic thesis, which would be rather burdensome for you to read. Is that ok?*

Ann
That sounds really interesting yeah.

Participant 6 - Naomi

PC
Right, I'll just…explain, this will pick up…don't worry about the conversation …I'll scribble while I ……. So what I need to put on err…what's your name again…it's usual……but…I'm obliged to tell you properly on tape that emm…I have to abide by the Northumbria err… code of ethical practice in research. Err, I mean it's never bothered me, I'm a member of the Market Research Society …that is a key research body and it's got it's own code of practice and the Chartered Institute of Marketing err…the CIM, …erm…the same kind of thing…ermm…just to repeat myself, I'm after…there aren't any answers, it's not a questionnaire……. Marketing in the old emm sense of the word is about products, but as I said earlier I'd like your world view …something strikes you about marketing – ethics – if you think about that Budweiser thing (we talked about this earlier in terms of advertising and ethics) or something ……. But marketing in the main is seen as being about products and prices…in the normal sense of marketing I mean…training courses and that sort of thing, but these days it's also about things that you might not have associated with it … it's about networking and it's something that we all have to do. I'm a bit rusty at it but you've got to get there. It's about relationships, networking, if you're a bit shy you've got to get over it (Naomi agrees with a yeah) emmm…I don't know but it's …that and I think these days it's about……you know especially your relationship (this is a partnership) (Naomi agrees with a mmmm), employee relationships, some, you know if you've got employees …your relationship with them err…you know you saw some of that on Wednesday – I'll not mention any names – a particular person and some of her employees were there and if you've got…… several dimensions. So it's really about emm…research on this – small firms…marketing as you perceive it. It's about management but it's kind of internal and external, inside the company and outside the company. Errr…so is there anything else I can explain or say?

Naomi
That's fine by me…is there anything else? No.

PC
Forgive my lack of shorthand. It's probably not gonna be needed…

Naomi
Fine, as long as you can read it (laughs)

PC
As long as this (points to recording device) doesn't fail (Naomi laughs).

APPENDIX III - SMES AND ENTREPRENEUR DEFINED, CHOICE OF SAMPLE AND BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

SMEs defined

Just what an SME is depends on who is doing the defining. From January 1st 2005, the new European Commission definition became active after being adopted on 6th May 2003. In this view, any business with less than a 250 headcount, 50m Euro turnover or 43m Euro balance sheet total is considered medium-sized. The respective figures for a small business are 50, 10m Euros and 10m Euros, and for micro businesses, the respective figures are 10, 2m Euros and 2m Euros. The detail of this would take too long to explain but for example in headcount terms, apprentices and students in training are no longer included. Such a definition is deemed necessary for many reasons including aid, investment and in order to avoid distortions in the Single Market (Source: European Commission, 2007, University of Strathclyde Library, 2007).

The UK definition harks back to the Companies Act of 1985 that has been amended several times. Here a small firm is defined as having a turnover of not more than £5.6m, a balance sheet of not more than £2.8m and fewer than 50 employees. Respective figures for medium sized firms are £22.8m, £11.4m and 250 employees. The British Bankers Association has its own definition laid out within its March 2005 code. Small business customers are defined as sole traders, partnerships, limited liability partnerships and limited companies with a turnover of less than £1 million. Associations, charities and clubs with an annual income of less than £1 million are included (University of Strathclyde Library, 2007).

In Canada, Industry Canada uses the term SME to refer to businesses with fewer than 500 employees. Firms with more than 500 are classified as large. A small business is one that has fewer than a hundred employees (if goods-producing) and fewer than 50 employees (if service-based). A firm that has more than these figures but fewer than

500 employees is classified as medium sized. A micro business is defined as having fewer than five employees (Source: About.com, 2007).

In the USA there seems to be a lack of a standard definition of the SME. This depends upon different industries and sectors. For example the cut off is 500 employees for most manufacturing and mining industries but 100 employees for wholesale trade industries while retail and service industries the figure is $6m annual receipts (Source: University of Strathclyde Library, 2007)

Entrepreneur defined

An entrepreneur is usually described as a person who starts and operates a new enterprise or venture and is accountable for the risk involved. This means that an entrepreneur might be involved with a business for profit but the term is also applied to those who would be social entrepreneurs where the venture might be not-for-profit.

Not all small firm owner-managers are entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs have characteristics as discussed in the literature review of this thesis. This includes independence, autonomy, the need to dominate and be in control and to direct others. Entrepreneurs have confidence and are self-centred with high self-esteem. This is why they are seen as good leaders in the sense that they are risk-takers but problem solvers. They have a desire to achieve, like hard work, can provide organisation and usually have a profit orientation.

Sample choice

In this thesis, I have focussed on people with SME marketing experience and this is common to all of my 14 participants. Some of the participants might show entrepreneurial characteristics but this is not a study of entrepreneurship. It is not about entrepreneurs versus small business owner-managers who are not particularly entrepreneurial. Nor is it about entrepreneurial marketing. It is essentially about SME marketing. The sample chosen was a non-probability sample not characterised by random selection. A combination of judgement, purposive, and snowballing sampling techniques was used to arrive at the sample of seven SME and seven ETD participants.

The nature of the subjective, interpretive research has meant that concerns over who is left out of the sample of who is underrepresented do not have the same resonance here as they would in research that was claiming to be representative and to allow for generalisations. The sample on the surface consists of two types of participant; those involved in the running of SMEs and those involved with the SME/small firm support network in the North East of England. In reality there is a mix of experience with some of the SME participants having SME advisory experience and some of the ETD participants having had or still have a part in a small firm. All participants in some way have had experience of SMEs and SME marketing. Some of the SME participants are involved with much larger businesses (yet still SMEs) but some of the participants deliberately chose to stay as micro businesses.

It was important that I used my judgement to select the sample. I am in a position to do this because I am familiar with the relevant characteristics of the population of both SMEs/smaller firms and ETD people/EDAs. Snowballing featured in as much that some of the early participants offered referrals. These participants knew what I was about and after or during the interview they offered up referrals. They were in a good position to know appropriate, relevant people to my study likely to agree to an interview. Not all participants came from this technique. This is usually used when desired characteristics are rare. This introduces bias but again I was not seeking to be representative or to generalise the findings. Rather, I was seeking insights, as discussed in chapter five, from the sample that can also be described as purposive because I had a particular set of items in mind. The information from the sample is rich and lends itself to DA where phenomena are manifested intensely but are not extreme. The sample fits the purpose of the study given the resources available and the research question set.

Participants' basic characteristics

Name and position	Gender	Age	Nature and years of business experience	Age of the current business	Description of business	Number of employees or turnover
1. Gordon, Sales Director	male	55	35 years in various businesses, mostly SMEs. Career in sales	20+ years	Office supplies	>10 £2m+
2. Ann, Managing Partner	female	48	10 years in business, 22 years in childcare in various roles. Qualified in childcare. Worked in schools, social services and a children's charity before setting up in business	5 years	Children's play and educational development equipment supplier. Offers training in childcare and parenting	>10 £2m+
3. Beth, Partner and Company Secretary	female	41	23 year involvement with family SME, recently set up a micro business	Family SME sold. Was > 20 years. Micro business 2 years	Builders Merchants Kitchen, bathroom and bedroom design and supply	>10 family SME £2m+ 2 partners + associates Currently around £100k
4. Jack, Managing Director	male	25	5 years in SME. Left to set up own micro business	3 years	Internet-based personal and office electronics and accessories	2 partners, 1 full time manager plus part time admin workers Unknown turnover
5. Charlotte, Managing Director	female	55	Experienced Fleet Street journalist	A number of years Several	Career journalist Marketing	N/A > 10

			Own marketing communications company Involved with dot com boom in late 1990s. Current business	years Several years 5 years	Communications company with a broad range of clients including BtoB clients Dot com businesses Business Club and advisory services to SMEs	 > 10 Unknown turnover 5 full time team 2 part time £250k
6. Naomi, Managing Partner	female	27	Legal secretary in small law firms One business	8 years 1 year	Legal Secretarial Service to Law Firms	N/A 2 partners Unknown turnover
7. Sid, Managing Director	male	59	Many years in engineering businesses, mostly SMEs	20+ years	Engineering SME	> 10 £2m +
A. Charles, Educator/trainer/developer/business adviser	male	27	Business advisor	6 years	EDA	N/A
B. Dave, Educator/trainer/developer	male	47	SME marketing Career in university education	Several years > 15 years	Sports equipment SME Business School marketing	Unknown N/A
C. Sean, Educator/trainer/developer	male	50	Previous engineering career Business	> 20 years 10 years	Various companies University - Commercial	N/A

			advisor and consultant		arm	
D. Peggy Educator/trainer/developer plus partner in	female	47	Previous marketing career Marketing manager and advisor Own micro business	> 20 years 10 years 5 years	 EDA Own micro business	N/A N/A Unknown
E. Geoff Educator/trainer/developer	Male	57	Previous career in engineering Business advisor and consultant	> 20 years > 10 years	Various companies EDA	N/A N/A
F. Jane Educator/trainer/developer	female	30	Business advisor	6 years	EDA	N/A
G. Heather Educator/trainer/developer	female	50	Business experience Business advisor Own business as business coach	> 20 years 10 years 5 years	Various companies EDA Own Business	N/A N/A Unknown

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