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THE ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS AND MATRIX MARKETING

There has been extensive and long-lasting debate in the UK about the purpose and scope of appropriate management research. Many authors elucidate that it is widely agreed that management research does not operate a single agreed scientific paradigm and can be seen as a soft, applied area of study, showing features of both, 'engineering' and 'craft' orientations. Nevertheless, the need for management theory to be made more relevant to the work of practice by explaining that it will be necessary to identify new ways of formulating and employing scientific knowledge to practical ends is the basis of this work.

However, some authors argue that the process of managerial decision-making, a major aspect of the strategic planning procedure, has become more problematic because modern management, more than ever before, is faced with an immense complexity of tasks and an increasingly volatile business environment. For many years writers have been suggesting that organisations should focus and rely on the fundamental formal models and techniques of strategic planning.

Keywords

Action research, Heuristic devices, Positivism, Phenomenology, Matrix marketing, Management process.

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INTRODUCTION

Planning systems were expected to produce the best strategies as well as step-by-step instructions for carrying out those strategies so that the doers, the managers of business, could not get them wrong. As we now know, planning has not exactly worked out that way. (Mintzberg 1994a, p. 107)

Mintzberg's view on marketing planning, although articulated in a "certain cynicism of tone" (Mintzberg 1994b, p. 4), reflects existing critical discussions concerning the marketing theory in general, and strategic planning and marketing models in particular. The arguments forwarded in these discussions can be dichotomised as follows.

Firstly, marketing's academic advance is questioned. The prevalence of positivistic values in marketing (see, for example, Deshpande 1983, p. 104; Arndt 1985, p. 11) ties the approaches to theory-generation to the requirements of this paradigm, i.e. rigour, detachment, objectivism, deduction, and the use of quantitative methods. (McDonald 1992, p. 8; Hunt 1994, p. 13) These attributes have, however, come under increasing criticism with the emergence of alternative paradigms, especially the phenomenological worldview, which inverts most of the positivistic principles.

In consequence, marketing academia has been criticised for lacking the ability to theory-generation due to the application of positivistic methods. As a consequence, it is argued that existing theory, especially in the strategy field, is based on developments of the 1960's while advances have been limited to elaboration. (Hunt 1994, p. 14)

Secondly, there is scepticism concerning the practical applicability of marketing theory. The notion of the 'ivory tower of academia' characterises the estrangement of theory from practice and the irrelevance of much academic work for practical application. There is, furthermore, criticism concerning strategic planning, ranging from general scepticism about the effects of planning to detailed analyses as to how certain barriers hamper corporate planning.

One signpost for the solution of this problem could be the development of another approach to problem solving on the practical level and theory generation in an academic sense.

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The procedure described below is believed to offer an appropriate way of researching the main questions this article is concerned with. It shall guide the reader and show what steps will be followed to investigate the possibility of combining both, heuristic devices and action research, in one integrative model.

Basically, the work is divided into three major parts, Theoretical Analysis, Practical Analysis and Model Integration, which *are depicted in the subsequent figure:*
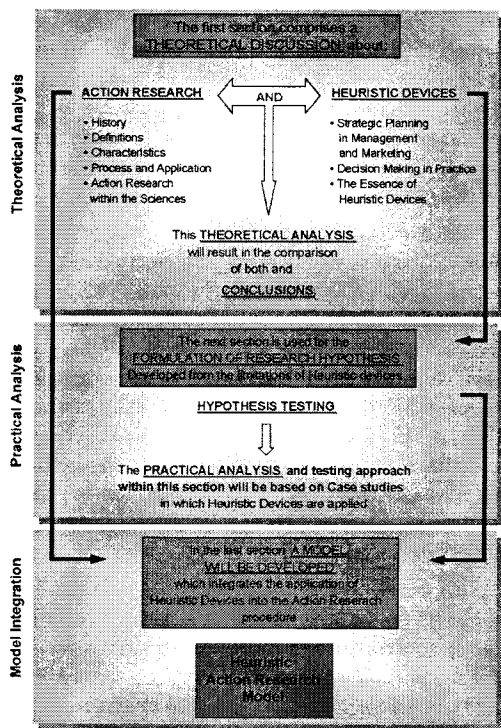
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Philosophical background of the research

The research method adopted is likely to be tied to certain assumptions about how to observe and understand people's behaviour and ideas. These assumptions, reflected in paradigms, or worldviews, are frequently challenged by sociologists holding different views about the nature of science. Currently, there are two dominant paradigms striving for dominance in the social sciences. The first, older one, is positivism. The basic belief of this paradigm is the existence of a truth or objective reality waiting to be discovered by social scientists. The discovery of this reality and the general causal laws that govern behaviour is

characterised by a detached, neutral, and objective approach to research. Positivism is derived from the natural sciences and therefore reflects the assumptions and methodologies prevalent in this area; for example the quantitative analysis of data However, it is argued that positivistic methods were mainly developed for the verification and not the generation of new theory. (Easterby-Smith et al, 1999, p. 32) . Susman and Everet (1978, pp. 584.) present four elements to support this argument. Firstly, organisations are artefacts, created by human beings to serve their ends and they obey laws that are affected by human purposes and actions. Secondly, organisations are systems of human action in which the means and ends are guided by values. Thirdly, empirical observation and logical reconstruction of organisational activities are not sufficient for a science of organisation because organisations are planned according to their members' conceptions of the future. These conceptions do not have a truth-value in the positivistic sense. Furthermore, organisations can be understood experientially by organisational researchers and need not be supported empirically or validated logically to find the truth of many propositions. Fourthly, organisations can be legitimate objects of scientific inquiry only as single cases without considering whether such cases are subsumable under general laws. Knowledge about what actions are appropriate for problem solving need not be derived by reference of a general category of similar organisations from which we know what the best action to take is on average.

The second school of thought to consider is phenomenology. The starting point is the idea that reality is socially constructed and given meaning by people rather than objectively determined. Hence the task of the researcher should not be to gather facts and measure how often certain patterns occur, but to appreciate the different constructions and meanings that people place upon their experience.

The aims of this article are to test the appropriateness of the current Heuristic Marketing Devices process and the development of a new model based on these findings. Therefore, derived from the preceding discussion about paradigms, one part of the article includes positivistic aspects in order to evaluate and test existing theory. The second part, the generation of new model, follows a phenomenological methodology in order to be able to establish new aspects, which can themselves, are tested by the application of positivistic methods.

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Steps and interconnections of the research process

Due to the preceding discussion, the research in this article follows a two-step process. First, based on a literature research, hypotheses were developed, which were tested in an in-depth analysis of a limited number of phenomena. From that, the evaluation of the hypotheseswas possible. The next step is based on the observations made and is aimed at the development of a new model. This methodology was reflected in the research wheel forwarded by (Deshpande 1983).

Deshpande (p. 107) concludes that therefore (by using the example of marketing) a marketing scientist would be well advised to carefully study and then put into practice qualitative methods. Once the theory has been developed and grounded, the application of quantitative methods would be more appropriate.

The two steps of the research process also reflect two distinct methodologies. Deduction, displayed in the right sector in the subsequent figure, has the purpose of explanatory theory testing. Induction, displayed in the left sector, contains the extrapolation from the data insights into human behaviour. General statements about social life deriving form specific behaviours observed; this process is also referred to as grounded theory, because it is grounded-it has its base in specific observations of social life.

Literature on action research

Action research, "research into practice, done by practitioners, for practitioners".is seen as a way of investigating professional practice via continuously developing sequences of 'action' and reflection (Zuber-Skerrit, 1996, p. 5; p. 13). Action research is an approach, which aims at both, taking action and creating knowledge or theory about the actions.

A majority of authors trace the invention and introduction of the term 'action research' back to Kurt Lewin, a social scientist, who first developed the action research concept in the 1940s to respond to the increasing problems he perceived in the social sciences(Coghlan and Brannick, 2001, p.4).

However, some authors claim that the practice of action research is a good deal older than the actual term noted by Lewin. Warmington (1979, p. 1) for instance illustrates research projects in the late '20s and early '30s which, due to his view, had most of the traits that are said to be characteristic of contemporary action research.

In reflecting on Lewin's work, Argyris (1993) identifies and summarises four "core themes" of his particular approach to social inquiry:

1. *Lewin took an approach to integrate theory with practice and connected all real life Problems with theory.*
2. *He designed research by framing the whole and then differentiating the parts.*
3. *He saw the researcher as an inventor and emphasised that one could only understand something when one tried to change it.*
4. He changed the role of those being studied from subjects to clients that help to produce more valid knowledge.

Action research, in the traditional (Lewinian) sense, can be seen as an approach to research that is based on a collaborative problem-solving relationship between researcher and client which simultaneously aims at the solution of a perceived problem and the generation of new knowledge.

*"**Action Research is ... carried out by a team** encompassing a professional action researcher and members of an organisation or community seeking to improve their situation. **Action Research promotes broad participation** in the research process and supports action leading to a more just or satisfying situation for the stakeholders." (Greenwood and Levin 1998, p. 4)*

Concerning the definition of the action research concept, Susman and Evered (1978, p. 586) believe that Lewin gave a clear and concrete picture of what he meant by the term 'action research' and what the distinctions were to the mainstream of traditional scientific research.Dickens and Watkins (1999, p.127) on the other hand, argue that Lewin still left space for interpretations. This can be learned form the proclamation of Argyris, Putman and Smith (1987) that they actually never formulated a systematic statement of their views on action research (Dickens and Watkins, 1999, p.127) and that their initial contribution merely comprised 22 pages in two papers that directly addressed the topic.

Therefore, over the years, many authors have developed their own ideas and definitions on Lewin's basic framework, and diverse claims have been made for and about action research in a variety of contexts (Peters and Robinson, 1984, p. 113).

Probably best known and most cited is Rapoport's (1980, p. 499) definition of action research, who also pays attention on action research being a practical and collaborative undertaking within a acceptable ethical framework:

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"Action research aims to contribute both to the **practical concerns of people** *in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by* **joint collaboration** *within a mutually* **acceptable ethical framework***."*

has resulted in the fuzzy categorisation of types of research all of which subsumed under the broad notion "action research".

Coghlan and Brannick (2001, p 5) endeavour to categorise action research by referring to Argyris (who summarises Lewins concept) for the description of the main characteristics of action research:

Gronhaug and Olson (1999, p. 9), who engage in a closer inspection on the designation of action research, identify the action research concept being distinctively different from the "traditional" stream of "scientific" research. The authors declare by undertaking a comparison between both of them that action research:

1. *emphasises the importance of both scientific contributions and the solving of practical, real-life problems (even though this also often is the purpose of (much) traditional research, the research as such is frequently separated from future actions);*

2. *focuses on the common values and standards of researchers and clients (the value standards of researcher and clients - even though important - are* usually not explicitly taken into account in "traditional" research);

3. *represents an intensive research strategy (which also may be the case, but need not necessarily be so in "traditional" research);*

4. *involves some aspects of collaboration between researcher and client (which is paid almost no attention in prototypical "traditional" research, cf. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996);*

5. *Is longitudinal and emphasises gradual learning and improvements (even though the learning aspect is crucial in "traditional" research, very much of the research focuses on the single study. In "real-life", however, the focus is often on longitudinal knowledge creation and learning);*

6. *Assumes that the researcher needs contact and interaction with clients to really know their problems and influencing factors (cf. "the total situation"). As such, this represents a deviance from the "traditional", distant and "objective" research ideal. This may also explain the strong* **antipositivistic** *attitude reflected in very much of the action research literature.*

Within the attempts to characterise action research, some academics make claims on its characteristics that go well beyond those made by Lewin himself (Peters and Robinson, 1984, p. 116). The following figure illustrates the keyfeatures given by eleven salient authors writing about action research:

	General												Idiosyncratic		
	Problem-focused	Action-oriented	Organic process (i.e. cyclical)	Collaborative/ participatory	Ethically based	Experimental	Scientific	Naturalistic	Normative	Re-educative	Emancipatory	Stresses group dynamic	Concretely critical	Low a priori precision With high accuracy	Unconstrained dialogue
Argyris (1980)	[✓]		[✓]	[✓]	[✓]		✓			✓	✓			✓	
Corey (1953)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓						
Cunningham (1976)	✓	[✓]		✓					[✓]	[✓]		✓			
Elliot (1979)	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓		✓				✓
Foster (1972)	✓	[✓]			✓	✓									
French & Bell (1973)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓						
Kemmis (1981)	[✓]	✓		✓	[✓]	[✓]	[✓]	[✓]		[✓]	✓		✓		
Ketterer et. al. (1980)	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓							
Rapoport (1970)	✓	[✓]		✓								✓			
Smith (1977)	[✓]	[✓]	[✓]	✓	✓	✓	✓								
Lewin (1946)	✓	[✓]		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	[✓]				

* A check mark in brackets   [✓] indicates that the author has mentioned this characteristic, but has not highlighted it
** A check mark indicates that the author has explicitly highlig hted this characteristic

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The Action Research Process

In Lewin's original contribution, he suggested a scheme of how to perform an action research project. His idea of action research implied several cycles of analysis, fact-finding, conceptualisation, re-conceptualisation, planning and evaluation to be carried out simultaneously to generate knowledge and find practical (workable) solutions (Dickens and Watkins, 1999, p. 133). Lewin emphasised the necessity of continuous research activities to unravel the problem gradually as new data is gathered and interpreted and the understanding of the problem is enhanced during the research process (Gronhaug and Olson, 1999, p. 9).
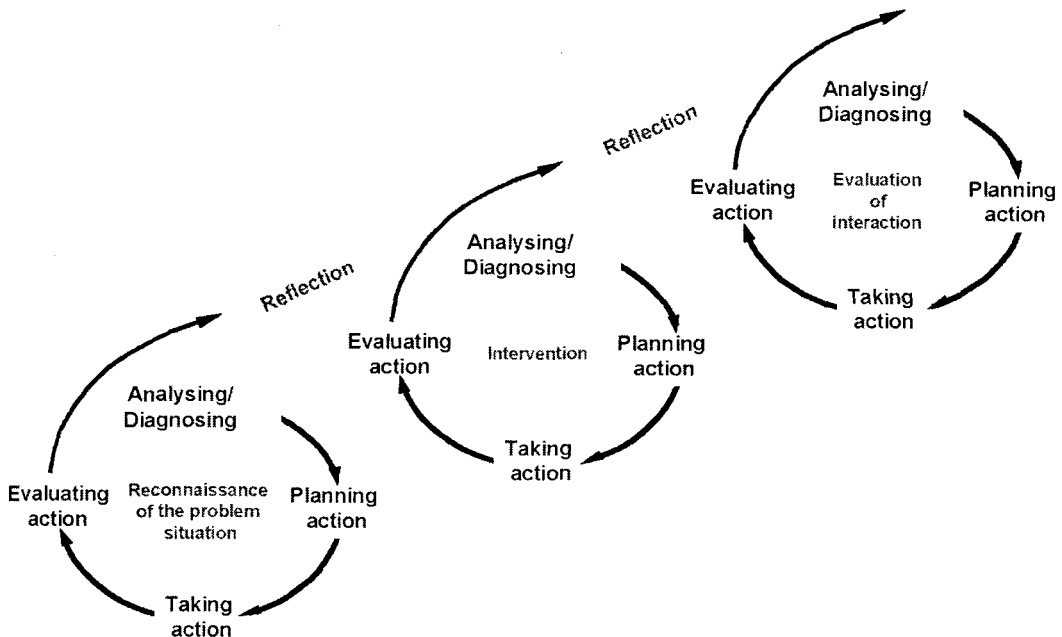
In compliance with the Lewinian model of action research authors like Zuber-Skerrit (1996, p. 96) or Coghlan and Brannick (2001, p. 16) argue that action research projects in organisational contexts typically move through several distinct stages within a cycle, from the initial problem identification to its final solution. Coghlan and Brannick (2001, p. 17) furthermore suggest to pursue a 'pre-step' which has to be undertaken in order to understand the external and internal driving forces relating to the project. The three main stages diagnosing, planning, and action-taking and evaluation follow this initial 'pre-step'.

Coghlan and Brannick (2001, p. 19) describe this progression of insights as a process of 'meta-learning' actually consisting of two action research cycles operating parallel. In their opinion, one cycle is directly related to the project, whereas the other, a reflection cycle on the former one, tries to evaluate how the action research project itself is going and what can be learned for the next steps. This complies results of the previous loop.

Theoretical Background

A multitude of definitions of Action Research exist and various authors combine different attributes and characteristics with it. There is, in addition, a controversy about the recognition of Action Research as a scientific method. This discrepancy stems partly from the insufficient definition in Lewin's seminal work. Furthermore, differing underlying meta-theoretical views on the world and the nature and purpose of science, manifested in differing worldviews, paradigms, or orientations, exists. These ideas strongly influence perceptions concerning the nature of science, the subjective-objective dimension and the explicitness of long-term conflicts in society. In other words, the assessment of the scientific nature of Action Research strongly depends on the worldview or paradigm the assessor supports.

Figure 4: Evolving Spiral of Continuous Action Research Cycles

Source: Own Figure, adapted from Coghlan and Brannick, 1999, p.19; Cardno and Piggot-Irvine, 1996, p.19

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Therefore, the following abstract refers to the existence of different paradigms and highlights two accepted major exponents, positivism and phenomenology[1] (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 181). This will be the basis for the discussion about the scientific nature and location of Action Research in the field of science.

The term "paradigm" is often connected to the work of Thomas Kuhn in the 1960's. Kuhn argued that scientific progress happens in small steps as an enhancement and refinement to what is already known. (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1999, p. 22) Paradigms deal with the proper domain of a science, the research questions it should ask, and the rules to follow in the interpretation of the results. They form the foundation of theories, although they are no theories themselves, but often remain implicit, are taken for granted, and, hence, are usually unquestioned. Furthermore, paradigms are not neutral and value-free. They rather can be seen as social constructions reflecting the values and interests of the dominant researchers in a science and their reference groups. But paradigms are not static. Occasionally, research results do not fit into existing patterns and theories. If furthermore new ways of looking at things are proposed which can account for both the old and new observations a "scientific revolution" can occur.

Subsequently, a brief overview about the two major, and extreme, paradigms in social sciences, positivism and phenomenology is displayed and Action Research is located in this theoretical framework. Thereby, the designation "positivism" will be used vicariously for all terminologies pertinent to this worldview, or orientation (e.g. all approaches to science that consider scientific knowledge to be obtainable only from sense data that can be directly experienced and verified between independent observer, see: Susman and Evered, 1978, p. 583). The same applies for the term "phenomenology".

Positivism has a long intellectual history dating back to the late 15th and early 16th century where a strong faith in rationality existed (Deshpande 1983, p. 102), and is connected to the work of Bacon (1561-1626) and Descartes (1596-1650), (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 182). The perception of everyday scientific reality was in terms of human senses - if a phenomenon could not be seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted, then it could not exist The extreme positivism point of view man is a passive responder and reality is conceived as a concrete structure. In this perspective, knowledge can be created "at distance" (Gronhaug and Olson, 1999, p. 7). This positivist conception of science which has dominated the physical, biological, and social sciences for more than hundred years is at a later stage linked to the work of the French mathematician and philosopher Auguste Comte (1798-1857). He used the term "positive" to refer to the actual in comparison to the imaginary (Susman and Evered, 1978, p. 582) and argued that society could be studied by using the same logic of enquiry as that employed by the natural sciences. (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 182) Two assumptions underlie this paradigm; firstly, that reality is external and objective and secondly, that knowledge is only of significance, if it is based on observations of this external reality. (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1999, p. 22) They follow from some implications, partly put forwarded by Comte:

1 independence: the observer is independent of what is being observed;

2 value-freedom: the choice of what to study, and how to study it, can be determined by objective criteria rather than by human beliefs and interests;

3 causality: the aim of social science should be to identify causal explanations and fundamental laws that explain regularities in human social behaviour;

4 hypothetical-deductive: science proceeds through a process of hypothesising fundamental laws and then deducing what kinds of observations will demonstrate the truth or falsity of these hypotheses;

5 operationalisation: concepts need to be operationalised in a way which enables facts to be measured quantitatively;

6 reductionism: problems as a whole are better understood if they are reduced into the simplest possible elements;

7 generalisation: in order to be able to generalise about regularities in human and social behaviour it is necessary to select samples of sufficient size;

8 Cross-sectional analysis: making comparisons of variations across samples can most easily identify such regularities. (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1999, p. 23),

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1 Coupled to these two paradigms, the recent development of postmodernism must be mentioned. Nevertheless, this worldview is not included in this discussion because the current discussions about Action Research mainly exclude this topic. Furthermore, the constraints of this article do not allow for an all-embracing review of the extensive literature in this area.

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Furthermore the positivist view in the social sciences is the primary discipline and, although the philosophy is recognised as a separate discipline, it is seen as parasitic upon the findings of science. In addition, there is a fundamental distinction between fact and value: fact being the product of science, whilst value represents an entirely different and inferior order of phenomena. This reflects the underlying assumptions displayed above. There exist, however, various nuances represented by the many schools of positivistic thought, and the short description given in this paper does not do justice to all of them.

Largely in reaction to the application of positivism to social sciences, another paradigm has arisen. The primary objective of this worldview, termed phenomenology[2], is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced without theories about their causal explanation and as free as possible from unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions. Vico (1668-1744), for instance, argued that one could not study man and society in the same way as one studied inanimate nature (McLaughlin, 1993, p. 191). This paradigm therefore stems from the view that the world and "reality" are not objective and exterior, but that they are socially constructed and given meaning by people. This so called "phenomenology" or "idealism", was strongly influenced by authors like Husserl, Brentano, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Weber in the nineteenth century. Weber, for example, was more concerned with the mind as the creator of reality. (Deshpande, 1983, p. 102) One should therefore try to understand why people have different experiences, rather than search for fundamental laws and external causes to explain their behaviour (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1999, p. 24).

The differences between the phenomenological paradigm, which incorporates qualitative methods, and positivism, which follows a quantitative approach, are discussed subsequently. Reichardt and Cook state that

"...The quantitative paradigm is said to have a positivistic, hypothetical-deductive, particularis-

tic, objective, outcome-oriented, and natural science world view. In contrast, the qualitative paradigm is said to subscribe to a phenomenological, inductive, holistic, subjective, process-oriented, and social anthropological worldview. "(1979, p. 9, 10, in: Deshpande, 1983, p. 102).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994.p.11.) indicate that there are five interpretive paradigms that structure qualitative research: Positivist/postpositivist, Constructive, Feminist, Ethnic, Marxsist, and Cultural. Each interpretive paradigm makes particular demands on the researcher, determining the questions posed and influencing the decisions made. The authors further argue that qualitative researchinvolves the collection of a variety of empirical materials and the application of a wide range of methods(ibid. p.2.) The qualitative researcher is therefore equalled to a Bricoleur, being multimethodoligical in focus and putting togethere a series of practices that provide solutions.

The following illustration reflects major differences between the positivistic and the phenomenological paradigm:

Figure 5: Differences between positivism and phenomenology

	Positivist Paradigm	Phenomenological Paradigm
Basic beliefs:	• The world is external and objective • Observer is independent • Science is value-free	• The world is socially constructed and subjective • Observer is part of what is observed • Science is driven by human interest
Researcher should:	• Focus on facts • Look for causality and fundamental laws • Reduce phenomena to simplest elements • Formulate hypotheses and then test them • Work outcome-oriented • Analyse – Particularistic approach	• Focus on meanings • Try to understand what is happening • Look at the totality of each situation • Develop ideas through induction from data • Work process-oriented • Synthesize – Holistic approach
Preferred methods include:	• Quantitative methods preferred • Operationalising concepts so that they can be measured • Taking large samples • Uncontrolled, naturalistic observational measurement • Objective; „outsiders" perspective; distanced from the data	• Qualitative methods preferred • Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena • Small samples investigated in depth or over time • Subjective; „insider's perspective; close to the data
Question of Validity :	Does an instrument measure what it is supposed to measure ?	Has the researcher gained full access to the knowledge and meanings of informants ?
Question of Reliability :	Will the measure yield the same results on different occations (assuming no real change in what is to be measured) ?	Will similar observations be made by different researchers on different occations ?
Question of Generalisability :	What is the probability that patterns observed in a sample will also be present in the wider population from which the sample was drawn ?	How likely is it that ideas and theories generated in one setting will also apply in other settings ?

Source: Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1999, p. 27 and 41; Deshpande, 1983, p. 103

2 Heidegger, for instance, questioned the word "phenomenology" and traced it back to the meanings of the Greek concepts of *phainomenon* and *logos. Phenomenon* is "that which shows itself from itself," but together with the concept of *logos,* it means "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.". This definition is based on Aristotele's work.

(http://www.britannica.com/eb/
/article?eu=115435&tocid=68556#68556.toc)

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This figure displays the "pure" versions of each paradigm. Although the basic beliefs may be incompatible in theory, when it comes to actual research techniques often middle between both approaches is applied. (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1999, p. 26; McLaughlin, 1993, p. 181). Deshpande (1983, p. 107) states that several scholars have noted that quantitative methodologies - therefore following the positivistic paradigm - emphasise reliability (frequently to the exclusion of validity), while qualitative methodologies emphasise validity while downplaying reliability.

However, both approaches offer advantages for the researcher and have simultaneously been criticised.

Several attacks on positivism have been published by authors with a social constructions (or phenomenological) background. One of the strongest arguments has been on its assumptions of **value-freedom**. Authors like Habermas have pointed out that any form of knowledge is an instrument of self-preservation. Human interests condition the way we enquire into, and construct our knowledge of the, world. The positivistic claim for independence of values and interests can therefore be questioned in practice. Another aspect, important for the further discussion about Action Research, is the ability of the paradigms to **generate and test theories**. We could argues that the probably most telling and fundamental distinction between the paradigms is on the dimension of **verification versus discovery**. He furthermore states that quantitative methods - and therefore the positivist paradigm - have been developed most directly for the task of verifying or confirming theories and qualitative methods - the phenomenological approach - were purposely developed for the task of discovering or generating theories (Deshpande, 1983, p. 105).

Mintzberg (1979, p. 584) emphasises the importance of theory development and the application of exploratory research in contrast to a focus on "rigorous research methodologies". He states that "there would be no interesting hypothesis to test if no one ever generalised beyond his or her data" and that "the field of organisation theory has ... paid dearly for the obsession with **rigour** in the choice of methodology". (1979, p. 584 and 583)

Another point of critique is the increasing discrepancy between theory and practice. The often cited **"ivory tower"** (Byrne, 1990, p. 50; Rapoport, 1990, p. 506; Simon, 1994, p. 1; etc.) describes this "estrangement of academic research from business practice" (Simon, 1994, p. 5) over the last years. Byrne (1990, p. 1) cites the dean of a business school arguing that 80 per cent of management research may be irrelevant. The BAIN Commission on Management Research, as an answer to ensure research's distinctive contribution, demanded an increased collaborative dialogue between researchers and practitioners and emphasised the development of research on topics of critical importance to organisations and the practice of management. (McLaughlin and Thorpe, 2000, p. 6f.)

Schön (1991) describes the "high, hard ground where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and technique, and there is a swampy lowland where situations are confusing "messes", incapable of technical solution. He argues that the difficulty with the problems of the high ground is that they are quite unimportant to the majority of those in society, while the problems in the swamp are the problems of greatest concern.

Although the 'ivory-tower' problem applies to all kind of scientific research, it seems there is a greater concern with the positivistic scholar. First, there is a strong dominance of positivism in most management areas, especially in marketing. (Deshpande, 1983, pp. 106ff.) And second, the positivistic worldview is generally seen as being close to the academic while the phenomenological paradigm can be compared to the manager. (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 181)

However, it should be mentioned, that despite the increasing critique, positivism is not dead. McLaughlin (1996, p. 191) argues that a number of contributors to the Commission of Management Research (in 1993) complained that too much of management research was dependent on positivism.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1999, p. 32) argue that

"The strength and weaknesses of the phenomenological paradigm and associated qualitative methods are fairly complementary. Thus they have strengths in their ability to look at change processes over time, to understand people's meanings, to adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge, and to contribute to the evolution of new theories. They also provide a way of gathering data, which is seen as natural rather than artificial. There are, of course, weaknesses. Data collection can take up a great deal of time and resources, and the analysis and interpretation of data may be very difficult. Qualitative studies often feel very untidy because it is harder to

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control their pace, progress and end-points. There is also the problem that many people, especially policy-makers, may give low credibility to studies based on a phenomenological approach." (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1999, p. 32).

In addition, Hammersley (1995) identifies the relativism of phenomenology as a key stumbling block for this approach. The question is how social scientists can maintain that the researcher's reality or interpretation is more accurate and valid than that of the subjects of the study. This is especially relevant because both have the layman's world as their reference point and share the same resources. In other words, the phenomenological assumption that there is no universal truth determines that any position can be false if viewed from other points of view.

Due to the opposing standpoints of both paradigms, the proponents of the quantitative, or idealistic, worldview can be located on the opposite end of an objectivity-subjectivity continuum form those of the positivist school of thought. However, this does not necessarily mean, that no collaboration of both approaches is possible. Deshpande (1983 p. 107) concludes that (by using the example of marketing) a scientist would be well advised to carefully study and then put into practice qualitative methods. Once the theory has been developed a grounded, the application of quantitative methods would be more appropriate.

The criticism of Action Research must inherently reflect the criticism of phenomenology as both approaches share many similarities.

Rapoport (1980, pp. 503ff.) proposed three dilemmas of Action Research in which the resolution in one direction leads away from science, while resolution in the other direction leads away from action.

1 Ethical Dilemmas: Firstly, the clients' interests may differ from the ethical standards characteristic to scientific research. So can, for instance, an Action Research project aim at the maximisation of profit in a field that is harmful to the society, e.g. tobacco, or not medically approved health care products. Secondly, the confidentiality of the research subject may be endangered. This is, however a danger in all scientific research processes, but Action Research inherently reveals a multitude of information about the company and about individuals inside the clients' organisations, due to the close cooperation and participative nature.

Thirdly, an ethical dilemma can emerge when, after developing work for one client, a competitor approaches the action researcher for similar assistance. Here again, the great insight of the scientists into the clients' processes can lead to knowledge transfer. Fourthly, the personal involvement of the action researcher in the client organisations may pose ethical as well as technical problems. Over-involvement may result in bias and the urge to keep the action researcher's expertise in the firm can lead to job offers for the researcher. Finally, a frequent ethical issue arises in relation to competing action researchers or social consultants. A company can be motivated to seek to use an action researcher in organisational politics selecting what he likes and rejecting what he dislikes from the diagnostic stages of the work or from experiments which were pursued by other researchers or clients.

2 Goal dilemmas: Firstly, the action researcher has the problem to find a balance between being too theoretic (e.g. ivory tower discussion) or being too practical and not contributing to scientific knowledge. Secondly, the time gap between problem definition and decision making must be long enough to allow for thorough analysis, either naturally, by conducting research in advance, or by the deferment of the decision making process. Thirdly, the need for the action researcher to get a deep insight to achieve the scientific goal might collide with the practitioners' wish for confidentiality.

3 Dilemmas of initiatives: Firstly, the Action Research conception places the initiative with the client who has a problem that needs solution. This contrasts with the whole 'ethos of the academy', where protections have been erected and maintained in order to keep practical pressures off the scholar so that the researcher may conduct the value-free pursuit of knowledge with minimal interference. Secondly, the problem proposed by the practitioner might not be the most important one on which work has to be done. Thirdly, a defensive reaction of the research subjects may interfere with the action proposed by the researcher. Fourthly, a dilemma arises when one begins to appreciate the situation where an 'applied' social scientist may realise the need for certain problems to be solved but can discover no agency in society that is responsible for the solution of the problem.

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It is therefore proposed that in each case 'good' Action Research selectively combines elements of both worlds.

Gronhaug and Olson state that:

Over the years, Action Research has become acclaimed and criticised. At the same time as this research, tradition has been claimed to be the only way of producing useful knowledge by its (extreme) proponents (cf. Susman and Evered, 1978), action research has been deemed "inscientific", and to produce research of mediocre quality with unvalidated findings (Gronhaug and Olson 1999, p. 6)

Dickens and Watkins (1999, p. 131) highlight that Action Research has been criticised as either producing research with little action or action with little research, as being weak when merely a form of problem-solving and strong when also emancipatory, lacking the rigour of true scientific research; and lacking the rigour of true scientific research; and lacking in internal and external control. Therefore, as being of little use in contributing to the body of knowledge. It is furthermore argued, that the principles of action and research are so different as to be mutually exclusive, so that to link them together is to create a fundamental internal conflict.

Peters and Robinson (1984, p. 122) argue that Action Research does not currently enjoy the status of a paradigm in the social sciences, even though a small number of writers have spoken of it as such. Peters and Robinson argue that although some common methodological procedures, there is still no scientific community. Action Research can therefore not be seen as a paradigm In Kuhn's sense. The authors suggest that "at least" a certain self-consciousness by practitioners of their common membership has to be present, indicated by such things as the existence of professional journals and associations, a textbook tradition, and the like. Nevertheless, Peters and Robinson see a potential for Action Research to reach a paradigmatic status.

On the other hand, Peters and Robinson (1984, p. 117). state that Ketterer et al (1980) see Action Research as an emergent paradigm, and being one among a number of other approaches that hold considerable promise for the integration of theory and practice.

Literature on Heuristic Devices

The literature examines the strategic marketing management and planning process. Thereby, emphasis will be put on the limitations connected to this

work. Next, the use of Heuristic Devices to support strategic decision-making will be analysed. This article is written in, and for, the marketing scholar. Therefore, it is assumed that the readers of this article are familiar with the strategic management process. Due to the constraints of this work, emphasis was placed on the analysis of Action Research, as this is seen as a fairly 'new' topic in marketing. Consequently, the following discussion will only briefly reflect the existing literature on strategic planning and the use of Heuristic Devices.

Strategic marketing management and planning

Strategic marketing management[3] is widely reflected in the contemporary literature and there are various differing descriptions of this topic. Greenley (1989, p. 46) summarises several descriptions ranging from 'broad means of achieving given aims', 'fundamental means or schemes', 'crucial and central issues to the use of the marketing function', to 'the grand design to achieve objectives'.

A rather broad definition is given by Proctor and Kitchen:

"Strategic management is about steering an organisation so that it avoids the various threats that can exist in its environment while allowing it to take advantage of any opportunities that resent themselves." (Proctor and Kitchen, 1990, p.4).

Decision-making is at the heart of strategic management. (Wilson, and Gilligan,1997, p. 6) Detailed descriptions of the nature and different modes of strategic decisions are intensively discussed elsewhere (McDonald, 1996, pp. 12 ff.) It is suggested that strategic planning is superior to an unplanned approach to strategy definition. The paramount aim of strategic planning is the maximisation of success, in the form of increased and sustainable competitive advantage, (Easton, 1988, p. 31) by systemically analysing possible futures. However, it is unlikely that one single idea has long-standing impact on a firm's fortunes since ideas are soon copied and the competitive advantage is soon eroded. (Proctor and Ruocco, 1992, p. 50) This counts especially, because the marketing environment in which the company manoeuvres is becoming increasingly complex in terms of competition and fussy market boundaries.

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3 The integration of marketing as part of a market oriented business philosophy has led simultaneously to a greater proximity of marketing and management concepts. Furthermore, by organising and integrating all of the company's outside-oriented activities strategic marketing supports the strategic management process. (Jüttner and Wehrli, 1994, pp.42) Therefore, in this article strategic marketing management and strategic management will not be distinct.

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The process of strategic marketing planning follows the steps analysis, planning, decision making (or implementation) and control. These steps are expanded by several sub-steps by different authors

However, there are various critical voices, probably culminating in Mintzberg's (1994a) *"The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning"*. (Nicholls, 1995, p. 4)

Marketing theory has been criticised as being of little use for practitioners. There is a wide discussion about the "ivory tower" of academia (Byrne, 1990, p. 50) which is concerned with the estrangement of theory from practice. It is furthermore argued, that many non-academic voices, for example senior business people, consultants and journalists, are listened to in preference to marketing academics. The theoretical underpinnings of marketing thoughts are, hence, coming under an increasing threat and often they are being perceived as lacking any relevance for the modern business world. (Hill and McGowan, 1998, p. 70)

O'Driscoll and Murray (1998, p. 391) emphasise the importance of the relationship between theory and practice in any academic discipline with a closely associated area of professional practice and argue that there is considerable asynchrony in marketing. Several barriers to marketing planning were forwarded, namely cognitive, information, resource behavioural and cultural biases. McDonald, drawing on eleven studies dating back to 1966 concluded that the two biggest barriers are firstly, cultural political - lack of belief in marketing planning and/or the need to change and secondly, cognitive - lack of knowledge and skills. A detailed discussion of possible barriers to planning can be found elsewhere in literature. (See, for example, Saker and Smith, 1997, pp. 128.)

The use of Heuristic Devices to support strategic decision making

Procedures for deriving solutions from models are either deductive or inductive. A deductive process describes the movement from the model to a solution in either symbolic or numerical form. Such procedures are supplied by mathematics; for example, the calculus. An explicit analytical procedure for finding the solution is called an algorithm. Even if a mathematical model cannot be established or solved, and many are too complex for solution, it can be used to compare alternative solutions. It is sometimes possible to conduct a sequence of comparisons, each suggested by the previous one and each likely to contain a better alternative than given in any previous comparison. Such a solution-seeking procedure is called **heuristic**. Inductive procedures involve trying and comparing different values of the controlled variables, this can happen in iterative steps, reaching successively improved solutions until either an optimal solution is reached or further progressing cannot be justified in iterative steps.

Heuristic Marketing Devices, therefore, are models, which can be used by the practitioner in order to receive comparably quick solutions to complex marketing problems.The results do not need to bee mathematically correct; the strength of these models lies in their simplicity and their ability to model complex, sometimes even dynamic situations.

Greenley (1989, p. 46) displays four major bases that are used in the literature to explain the detail of marketing strategy. These are the marketing mixes, the product life cycle, market share and competition, and positioning. In addition, special strategies for both international and industrial markets are proposed.

Vignali et al. argues that the power of simple devices as managerial tools is well known. (Vignali, and Davies, 1994, p. 965) The authors highlight the example of the 4Ps, developed by McCarthy, and the Boston Consulting Group Matrix. In addition, McDonalds highlights the Ansoff Matrix, Market Segmentation, Product Life Cycle Analysis, Portfolio Management, and "a host of techniques" revolving around the four basic elements of the marketing mix, the 4Ps. (McDonald, 1992, p. 9)

These models are widely explained and analysed in the existing literature (see for example: Kotler, P. 2000, Baker, Wilson, 1997; etc.) Furthermore, the advantages and limitations of these models are frequently discussed elsewhere. Therefore, no deeper analysis of the existing models shall be displayed here.

The combination of AR and heuristic devices

Although on both topics, Action Research and Heuristic Marketing Devices, a multitude of literature is available; no concept of the combination of both approaches exists. This is partly determined by the different worldviews, which are prevalent in both approaches. Whereas Action Research is similar to the phenomenological paradigm, the marketing scholar very much reflects the positivistic philosophy). The marketing scholar has derived knowledge from the social sciences and therefore devoted to reductionism objectivism, rigour (McDonald, 1992, p. 8) and mainly quantitative methods are applied. (Hunt, 1994, p. 13). The limitations of this paradigm have been extensively discussed in the literature and there has been a call for the use of phenomenological methods in

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marketing (see for instance Hunt, 1994, p. 13; Mc-Donald, 1992, p. 8). The limitations of current marketing practice have an impact on both, academics and practitioners. One for example is, the inability of positivistic approaches to generate new theories. Hunt argues that currently there are no original contributions of marketing to the strategy dialogue; rather concepts developed in the 1950's and 1960's are borrowed (Hunt, 1994, p. 14). Furthermore it is seen that 'marketing's job' is to apply the theories of other disciplines to marketing phenomena - according to the "applied science" notion. This results in a lack of new theory, which reflects newer developments and an increasingly dynamic, volatile and aggressive environment. Therefore, practitioners are unable to rely on the academic developments of marketing in order to facilitate their strategic and tactical decision making.

In addition, it is argued that the use of existing models by practitioners is only limited. McDonald argues that the application of marketing theory in practice is practically non existent. He gives three reasons for this: Companies have never heard of the theory, companies have heard of it but do not understand it or companies have heard of it, have tried them and found that they are largely irrelevant. (1992, p. 8f.)

Nevertheless, the existing Heuristic Marketing Devices can offer practitioners powerful tools when applied adequately as can be seen by various case studies in which these models were applied under supervision of academics or consultants.

Action Research, on the other hand, is being increasingly applied in various business areas and has proved to offer several advantageous characteristics, which are superior to traditionally applied methods. However, Action Research also bears limitations, which have to be considered.

This leads to the challenging question, if it is possible to merge both approaches and utilise the advantages and existing expertise of both principles while trying to compensate the individual limitations of each principle. The result could be an advanced model - exploiting the benefits of positivism and phenomenology - with synergistic effects exceeding the benefits of a basic model.

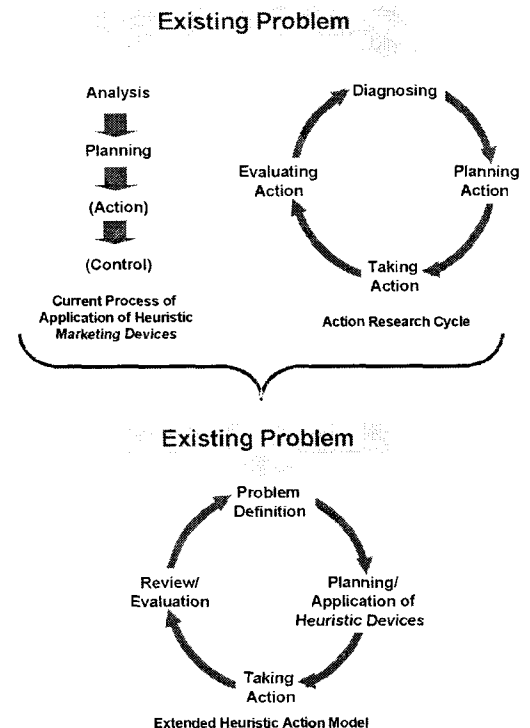## DEVELOPMENT OF AN EXPANDED MODEL

On the basis of the preceding analysis, an expanded model should be developed. The aim of this model is to overcome the limitations of the current process of application of Heuristic Marketing Devices by integrating parts of the Action Research methodology.

The process of integrating action research and heuristic devices

As outlined in this article, Heuristic Marketing Devices are often applied following a process of analysis, planning, and control. Thereby, a real world problem usually exists and triggers off the research process. However, as concluded above, not all application processes of marketing models encompass the control aspect. The main steps beginning with the existence of a real world problem are analysis/diagnosing, planning the action, taking action, and finally reflecting on and evaluating the action taken. These steps are repeatedly carried out, until a "best" solution is found.

The new model is based on the similarities of the processes. Therefore, the existence of a real world problem is the starting point, followed by the analysis of the situation, the planning of action facilitated by the existent marketing model, taking action and finally reviewing and controlling the taken action and the outcome. Therefore, a cycle, or spiral emerges which leads to continuous improvement. The differences and similarities in the process are highlighted in the subsequent figure:

Figure 1: Process of the Heuristic Action Model

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