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The customer as co-producer

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6

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Introduction

A look at what is happening in the world of business today shows that the focus of business development is now gradually moving away from products and factories. Instead, interest is concentrated on the various processes taking place around the customer. This orientation is not new. Concepts such as “customer orientation”, “close to the customer”, “customer segmentation” and “niche marketing” are well-known and much tested, along with ideas about “direct marketing”, “database marketing” and so on. The common denominator in all these concepts is a greater focus on the customer. Another step forward is the conception of the customer as co-producer.

The phrase itself – the customer as co-producer – occurs increasingly often in the literature (Davidow and Malone, 1992; Grönroos, 1990; Gummesson, 1991; 1993; Pine, 1993; Toffler, 1980; 1983), and we have to ask ourselves whether this is simply a variation on earlier attempts to reach the customer, or whether a pattern of action is emerging that is different, involving real rethinking and even new thinking. The most important point, of course, is how much extra value is this procedure capable of producing, and how much commitment and action is required of both the parties involved. And naturally the question also arises: how wide is the range of this new business logic? Is it restricted to industrial markets with few buyers and sellers and a well-established interactive way of working, and to service markets where the customer by definition is part of the production process? Or could it be applied to consumer markets as well?

In this paper the focus is on the co-production logic applied to consumer markets, and relating this to the experience and knowledge gained from industrial markets.

If we want to identify the basic ingredients in this idea of the customer as co-producer, we should perhaps look at an empirical case in which these ingredients are particularly prominent. But first, some clarification is required regarding the differences between the logic of co-production and that of the traditional transaction.

The idea is that when the customer is conceived as co-producer, the interaction between the parties should generate more value than a traditional transaction process, during which seller and buyer meet briefly, exchange

The creation of value in company-consumer interaction is the subject of a research programme the author is currently undertaking together with Jan Bäckman, Kaj Haataja and Anders Lundkvist. Bodil Ekström and Stephanie Smith (1995) have conducted a case study about, among others, Volvo and IKEA as part of this programme. The present analysis has benefited from helpful discussions with them. Nancy Adler has transformed the manuscript into good English.

finished products and services and then go their separate ways. Above all the new business logic presupposes a very much longer relationship between buyer and seller, and a highly refined distribution of roles. It is assumed that this will create more value in several ways. In particular it is assumed that the deeper relationship will create opportunities for acquiring more knowledge, thus making the company better able to adapt to the customer and to provide higher quality (Badaracco, 1991; Brown, 1991; Christopher *et al.*, 1991; Milgrom and Roberts, 1990; Wikström *et al.* 1994; Wikström and Lundkvist, 1995; Womack *et al.*, 1990). The whole process can move more quickly, since the different stages in the sequential transaction process (idea creation – production – marketing – consumption) shift ground and assume a new shape. Furthermore, the deeper interaction between seller and buyer improves the level of creativity on both sides; this in turn is likely to give birth to new ideas and to new ways of doing business. In other words co-production can be seen as a way of acquiring generative knowledge as well.

The customer as
co-producer

7

It sounds a seductive idea. But what does it mean in purely concrete terms – “the customer as co-producer”? What are customer and supplier supposed to do? How does the customer-market relation change, and what is the effect on production and organization within the company? We can illustrate this with the case of a company which we would not have expected to have any particularly advanced ideas about business logic, namely a laundry (Wikström and Lundkvist, 1995).

The Laundry

This is a company dealing with industrial laundry. What sounds like a comparatively trivial activity has been handled in an extremely creative way. The company has transformed its area of operations into a series of development projects, whereby the customer has become deeply involved in a whole stream of problem solutions.

With 22,000 customers on the Swedish market alone, The Laundry is the leader in its industry. The county council laundries are its fiercest competitor, and The Laundry has no chance of competing with their overcapacity when it comes to price. Volvo is the company’s biggest customer. At the Torslanda works alone, The Laundry handles working clothes for 12,000 employees.

When Volvo embarked on a course of general efficiency improvement, they also called for a rationalization of the laundry operation. The Laundry faced a tough challenge:

- To simplify the flow of information; 250 fax and telephone calls per day is an unmanageable amount.
- People vary in size. Every employee must have clothes to fit them personally.
- Every new employee should get his or her clothes within 24 hours, and should not have to wait for two weeks.
- There must be no errors in deliveries and no faults in the clothes.

Initially The Laundry felt greatly threatened, but accepted the challenge on condition that the relevant units at Volvo should also be actively involved.

With support from the clothing department of Volvo, the textile manufacturer and a computer specialist, a project group was set up including representatives from The Laundry shopfloor. In the course of joint seminars, draft solutions, follow-up discussions, revisions and various attempts at application, a whole new system emerged based on pincodes and online communication between customer, company and subcontractor.

As a result of this co-operative effort, The Laundry's original job expanded. What had begun as an ordering routine ended in The Laundry taking over Volvo's entire clothing management function, meeting all the initial requirements. Thus every worker received the requisite personal clothing within 24 hours, delivered cleaned and repaired to his or her locker at the beginning of the day. But the system offered even more. Statistics on the repairs indicated the need for changes on the shopfloor that would reduce wear and tear on the clothing and help to avoid injury at work. Communications between customer and supplier were not time-bound in any way, since everything was dealt with in a PC system.

The results of the deeper relationship between seller and buyer – with the customer involved as co-producer of the finished “product” – increased the value to both parties in the following concrete ways.

Volvo acquired an economically self-regulating system – a system of greater precision and less cost than the old one, and less time-consuming for its own staff. The Laundry acquired a satisfied and loyal customer, as well as a base for new business. It proved possible to adjust Volvo's standard system of modules, making it applicable to many of The Laundry's other customers as well. And with the same system in a modified form The Laundry can now also enter other fields of operations, where it is a question of handling large flows geared to individual adaptations. It has also proved possible to sell parts of the system for use in other kinds of operations.

Both parties have also become a good deal more knowledgeable, which on the seller's part has resulted in completely new procedures both internally and externally. The involvement of a customer (Volvo) as a co-producer has given The Laundry an entirely new approach to development work. In future the company will involve its customers in every new development project. It is already possible to see signs of this new approach in The Laundry's other fields of operations and, not least, in its understanding of how new knowledge is generated and maintained in the organization.

Basic principles

The deeper interaction between seller and buyer which is illustrated in The Laundry case gives us a chance to identify certain interesting fundamental ingredients in the co-production logic, and to discuss these in a more theoretical perspective.

The marketing management philosophy sees the relationship as a sequential process, in which the successive division of labour extends far into the company. Different departments handle different functions in a fixed order. It is

the task of the marketing function to sell and export the customer offerings thus produced. On the industrial markets the customer offering represents input into the customer company's own production process. If the transaction takes place on a consumer market, on the other hand, then the customer offering represents input into the customer's own consumption, which can also be regarded as a production process that creates value for the individual or the family (see Figure 1).

The customer as
co-producer

9

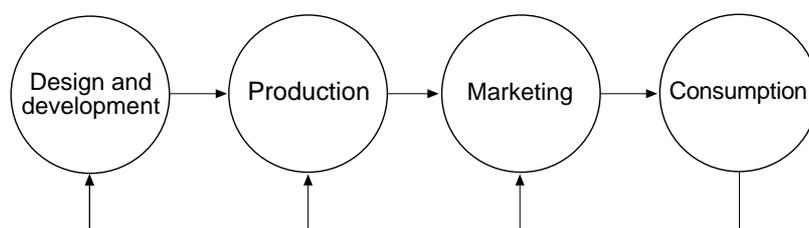


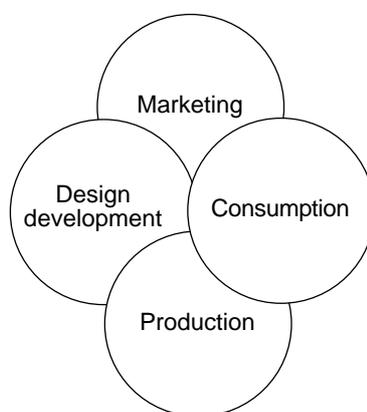
Figure 1.
The company-customer
relationship as a
sequential process

With this division of labour there is obviously a lapse of time between the different links in the chain. Porter has described this production logic as the value chain (Porter, 1990), in which the relations between the different links in the chain take the form of transactions. We could add to this model by saying that the transfer of the extra value created at each stage of refinement or storage assumes something in the nature of a logistic flow. Feedback follows the same sequential course. Marketing specialists absorb information about the market from demand analyses and from studies of customer requirements, attitudes and behaviour. Only then is the information communicated to those responsible for product development and production furthest back in the chain. In the case of The Laundry it is easy to see how the sequential course of the traditional value chain becomes compressed in both time and place, once the customer has become a co-producer. The processes overlap, and the value-creating activities occur simultaneously. The whole value-creating process is shifted forwards in the chain; its starting-point now lies in the requirements, demands and problems of the customer (see Figure 2).

Value-creation can be directed entirely towards supporting customers in their own value-creation, which in turn can assume a variety of forms – lower costs, better quality, better fit, greater speed, greater convenience, etc. I shall return to the question of the benefits which this interactive logic can create, and also to the problems that can arise.

Thus it is no longer a question of creating value for the customer; rather, it is about creating value with the customer and incorporating the customer's value-creation into the system. What the company thus provides is a complement to the knowledge, resources and equipment possessed by the customers themselves. From this co-ordination in time and place there emerges a new value which is jointly produced. Compared with the old approach, this means a shift in perspective, a change from a producer-customer perspective to a co-production perspective (see Normann and Ramirez, 1990; Wikström *et al.*, 1994).

Figure 2.
The company-customer
relationship as a
simultaneous and
interactive process



Theoretical framework

In moving from the basic principles to their applicability, our next question is what are the preconditions for this logic in consumer markets? The theoretical framework used for this analysis is built on theories from industrial markets, organizational theory and the theory of learning.

In industrial markets buyer-seller interaction has been thoroughly researched both empirically and theoretically, and well-developed predictive models have been made. In the present case I am using a model of buyer-seller interaction suggested by Hakansson and Östberg (1975), which will be presented briefly below. I have chosen this model because it is powerful, it has relatively few variables and is based on recognized inter-organizational theory. Another strength is that the model has been developed and tested in an environment – the IMP research group in Uppsala – which is widely recognized for its front-line research in industrial buyer-seller relations[1]. Following these authors I define co-production as buyer-seller social interaction and adaptability with a view to attaining further value.

According to the model the degree of social exchange and adaptability (co-production) is then decided by:

- Perceived uncertainty and perceived benefits. The greater the uncertainty, the more social exchange is needed; and the more benefits expected, the greater the willingness to adapt.
- Situational variables relevant in the particular context refer to exchange, the two parties involved and the environment.
- Relevant characteristics of the exchange include, for example, standardization vs complexity and quantities exchanged, where the complexity and quantities involved enhance co-production.
- The characteristics of the main parties involved, according to the model, are: their technologies, their organizational structure, and a perceived ability to reduce one another's uncertainty.

- The characteristics of the environment (the market) are defined according to a four sector matrix: homogeneous-heterogeneous and stable-dynamic where heterogeneity and dynamism promote interaction.

The customer as
co-producer

In later versions of the theories of buyer-seller interaction and network theories, the process of learning that accompanies this way of working is emphasized. Grabher (1994) points out the interdependence of the network actors that results from successive processes of interaction and adaptation. As a result of these processes any disagreements that emerge in the course of the exchange relation, are resolved within the relation rather than by reorganizing relations. Hence, learning about and from each other takes place as part of the “voicing”. In the terminology introduced in Hirschman (1970), the concept of “voice” replaces for “exit”.

Lundvall (1993) is even more explicit about the benefits of letting the learning process take place within the network, which in his terminology is the organized market:

The most fundamental aspect of the organized market is the ongoing process of exchange between users and producers of qualitative information. The information exchanged involves a change in the knowledge base of both parties and, more correctly, one may characterize such change as a process of interactive learning that enhances the innovative capability of the producers and the competence of the user (Lundvall, 1993, p. 55).

Organization theorists such as Argyris and Schön (1978), Senge (1990) and Rohlin *et al.* (1994) remind us that learning does not follow automatically from the exchange of information. Taking information on board is only distantly related to real learning (Senge, 1990, p. 13). Learning presupposes reflection, resulting in new ways of acting according to the insights gained by the reflection.

Learning, it is maintained, may take place on two levels. Adaptive learning mainly works within defined norms, thus contributing to a better fit, while generative learning or second loop learning (see Argyris and Schön, 1978) calls for the authority to question established norms. Hence, generative learning opens the way for innovation and new business development, in this case in terms of either totally new offerings or new parts included in an existing offering.

Learning, as can be seen, makes demands on management style and organizational structure, as well as on the competences and authority of staff and consumers. Learning thus presupposes that the people in the system, including the consumers, are allocated a reflective role and that there is an organizational structure capable of exploiting the ideas and suggestions that come up.

In consumer markets it is obviously more difficult for producers to learn together with the end-users, as the two sides have few interaction points, and the capacity of the retailer, as the intermediary, to function as a channel for their exchange of information is often limited.

This brings us to the question of the potential for interactive and adaptive value-creation in consumer markets. The analysis that follows is based on examples from the literature and from cases included in ongoing research.

Co-production activities

Available examples suggest that co-production often takes place in one of the activities in a value-creating process (see Figure 1), but rarely in all of them. As the conditions of such activities vary, the analysis is undertaken for each of them separately.

Design

Interaction and adaptation in designing the individual offering are concerned with matching the consumer's specific needs with the best and most effective way of providing for them. The design may consist of a specification, or of modules combined in an individual way.

Bicycles, chairs correctly designed for comfort, jogging shoes and made-to-measure clothing are all current examples of mass-production adapted to the individual. This mass-consumption appears to be a rapidly growing area, particularly in the US (Baden-Fuller and Stoppard, 1992; Pine, 1993; Pine *et al.*, 1995; Peppers and Rodgers, 1993).

Customization is not limited to small niche companies only. Volvo, for example, customizes most of its new cars. The dealers interact with the customers in the designing work, using a three-dimensional sales support system that allows the customer to try out alternative details and to see the appearance of the car as a whole, before decisions are made. IKEA, another multinational company that builds heavily on mass-production, arranges for its customers to design their own kitchens in interaction with a trained sales representative. Like Volvo, IKEA works out the solutions on a computer screen, and has recently extended the idea of customization by experimenting with computers in the stores so that the customers can even design their own sofas. IKEA has realized that consumers no longer want to see the same furniture in their neighbours' houses as well. Under the computerized system IKEA and the customers both get an opportunity to survey the vast range of possibilities now available as a result of module combinations.

How can this increasingly common work logic be explained? What kind of changes are driving its development?

The studied cases concern standardized offerings becoming tailor-made, so the driving-force from the consumers' side cannot be about reducing uncertainty, as the theories maintain; rather, the opposite seems to be the case. Involvement in a tailor-made solution causes more uncertainty, since the outcome cannot be inspected in advance as in the standardized alternative. So the impetus must be connected with expected benefits and growing aspirations, and with new characteristics and new capabilities on the part of those concerned.

To sum up: co-production in design appears to be driven by changes in the perceptions of the benefits of co-production such as more individualized

solutions, and by changes in situational variables and in the capabilities of the buyers and sellers. Both parties have become more flexible and more communicative, partly owing to new technology and partly due to a higher level of education and greater competence. Some consumer groups are deeply committed to their own type of specialized consumption, and they exhibit much the same capability as industrial buyers.

The customer as
co-producer

The industrial model suggests that interaction and adaptation are more likely to appear in heterogeneous and dynamic markets. However, in the consumer markets under discussion here the structure can be characterized as fairly homogeneous. There are many suppliers providing more or less the same offerings, and apart from fashion changes there is little dynamism. But interaction and adaptation are likely to make the market more heterogeneous and dynamic, which may be why companies are ready to adopt the interactive work logic.

13

Production

There are fewer examples of interaction in production. One alternative is that the consumers take over the finishing, in order to get a better fit or to reduce the cost. IKEA furniture offered in flat packages is a relevant example.

When customization occurs at the point of delivery as in Personics' in-store cassette system, whereby customers can make cassettes with a chosen selection of music, the customer is in fact interacting in both design and production. Doing the finishing at the point of delivery seems to be an expanding work logic (Pine, 1993), and it involves a big change in the distribution of roles: drilling holes in the bowling ball to match the customer's hand, stringing the customers' personal choice of material on a tennis racket to their exact tension specifications, shaping the inside of a pair of boots to the customer's feet. Not only consumers, but retailers too are being given a production role, in which the interaction and adaptation instead concerns the retailer and the consumer.

Another way for companies to create more value by involving consumers, is to provide tools and systems which enable consumers to do things for themselves which they could not do before. The teller machine and online banking are two examples of systems where consumers are taking over part of the banking services. The new extended telephone is another tool which helps consumers to undertake service activities such as sending faxes, providing an answering service and setting up telephone conferences.

An example from another area is the fast expanding system for self-care which replaces hospital care. More and more therapies can be applied in the patient's home, with the support of this system.

This extended consumer production entails more adaptability than exchange, which is rather static and programmed, and involves more extension of the consumer role than of interaction. Consequently the work logic is based on the consumers' capacity for learning and on the amount of value they ascribe to being independent of time and place. This is apparently an attractive benefit, since the creation of tools and systems of this type is among the fastest growing industries.

Consumption

A crucial part of overall value-creation is taking place in the consumer domain, but it can nonetheless be regarded as production[2]. In this phase the consumers create their ultimate value, while the suppliers have a supportive role. In this perspective the suppliers are now co-producers to the consumers. The involvement of the supplier in consumption is nothing new, and it has traditionally been given the “after sales” or “customer service” label.

These service activities fulfil two quite different functions. One is to receive complaints and to correct faults. The other is more proactive and focuses on supporting the customers in getting more value out of their consumption. With the improvements in quality that are now being made, the complaints and service functions can be expected to decline in importance, while support seems to be becoming more important.

In consumption, which is of great and perhaps sensitive importance to the consumers, and where adequate knowledge and information are limited, a supplier support system can add substantially to the consumers’ value-creation and to the building of long-term company-consumer relations.

Nestlé provides an illustration of how the consumers of small items of packaged goods can be encouraged to participate in dynamic interaction with the company. Nestlé provides the opportunity, ten hours a day, and six days a week, for customers to talk to a licensed dietitian on a free helpline about a baby’s eating needs.

In the case of new products, services or systems in which the consumers take on new activities, a functioning support system is even more important. Indeed, the potential benefits of the offering depend to a great extent on this support. Besides manuals and access to customer service by telephone or fax, new alternatives are emerging for the provision of this support. An investigation on the Swedish market revealed that some small retailers in electronics and sports equipment provide a “value cheque” with the product, which entitled the customers either to take part in a special training course in the use of the advanced camera, or to a pair of Telemark skis or an aerobics bicycle.

An interactive process based on learning should offer rich opportunities for questions and reflections from which improvements and innovations can in turn develop. To what extent are these different learning possibilities being exploited?

Conditions and outcome

Most research on buyer-seller interaction and adaptation and on the network approach has been conducted in industrial markets, and the findings thus concern relations between companies. Some researchers (Nyström, 1990) maintain that, in comparison, lasting adaptive relations in consumer markets are rather restricted, because the purchases of each individual buyer are smaller and less frequent, and the items are less complex. Another explanation is that in the consumer market the company sells things that have already been made and can thus choose certain appropriate customer segments, while in industrial relations adaptations are made after a specific customer has been chosen

(Nyström, 1990). Grönroos (1990) is more open to the idea of interaction, but also sets certain limits. He points out that in the case of consumer durables there is already an element of customer interaction, since this type of product often calls for delivery, installation, adjustment and service. The three functions are increasingly merging with one another, with the exception of small-item consumer packaged goods, where he concludes that there is not much room for interaction.

The customer as
co-producer

In an investigation of mass-customization, Pine (1993) comes to the same conclusion as the IMP-group, namely that a higher level of turbulence favours a customization strategy while a low level of turbulence allows for continued standardized mass-production.

As the above cases and examples have demonstrated, the sequential transaction model is no longer a driving-force on consumer markets, not even in the case of small-item packaged goods. Naturally the exchange conditions are not the same as in industrial markets, but an interactive arrangement still seems to be a possible and even an attractive approach to adopt.

Whereas in industrial markets certain characteristics – heterogeneity and dynamism for instance – pave the way for interaction, consumer interaction may take place in markets that are homogeneous and stable but where the interaction seems to provide a way of making them more heterogeneous and dynamic, as the Volvo and IKEA cases have shown.

Another way in which consumer markets differ from industrial markets, in this context, is that interaction is not undertaken with a view to reducing risk. On the contrary, buying first, and making afterwards involves more risk than buying standardized offerings that are available for examination in advance.

The IMP-model can highlight other factors behind interaction in consumer markets, e.g. the importance of new technology, increased capability among those concerned, and changes in organizational structure. In most of the available examples the interaction is IT-based, which keeps the cost down and hence makes the work logic viable.

With regard to capability, the logic is supported by the higher level of education among consumers and by their raised aspirations demanding a more individualized supply. On the company side, as the cases have demonstrated, new competences are needed, especially at the front line. Those selling customized IKEA kitchens, for example, have to know how to make the three-dimensional drawings with the help of a computer and how to combine the available modules; further, they have to develop an ability to listen and interpret the customers' intentions and wishes.

In industrial markets interaction and adaptation mean involving several functions in the company (see e.g. Håkansson, 1982), which in turn means a broader interface and more opportunities for social exchange and learning. In consumer markets interaction still appears to be conducted entirely by front-line people. Nonetheless the logic may have implications for the organizational structure, as will be demonstrated. IKEA has big ideas about stimulating their customers' creativity by involving them in more activities and in more areas apart from kitchens and sofas. The new selling system changes the traditional

process of buying by giving the customers a more advanced role. But is IKEA learning from and with its consumers, in a productive interaction which should ultimately accord with the broad set of theories referred to above? In the consumer market the barriers to such learning still seem to be considerable.

IKEA's ambition is to create some sort of channel for information from the customer interface and back to product development and other parts of the organization. But there are difficulties:

To highlight and make use of the knowledge of individual consumers requires big investments as well as a long planning time. We have not yet found any working channels for this. There is however great potential (IKEA, June 1995).

Volvo has the same type of ambition about consumer interaction, and regards information stemming from the consumer as a valuable asset. The company realizes that such information can be important to management at the strategic level:

We would like to find out more about the consumers' wants and ideas. And yet our feedback process is only about sales statistics. Our sales support system is not capable of supplying the requisite information to management, but our ambition is to start up such a system (Volvo, June 1995).

It seems that co-production in the consumer market is limited to interacting and adapting, resulting in customized offerings. Given the programmed procedures for interacting and the lack of channels back into the company, very little learning – adaptive or generative – is likely to accompany the interaction. This appears to be the case not only in design and production, but in after-sales activities as well. Fornell (1981) concludes:

Empirical research suggests that most corporate consumer affairs departments are not a part of the decision-making structure of their respective firms. The typical consumer affairs department appears to have little influence on management decisions... As a result, it is of limited value for the consumer (Fornell, 1981, p. 191).

To this could be added: of limited value to the company as well. More recent research suggests that the situation has not changed (Fornell and Westbrook, 1984; Haglund and Öberg, 1995). Rapp and Collins (1990) point out that most companies have a custom service function, but very few seem to use it to its full potential.

As the Volvo and IKEA cases show, a more fruitful way of using the interaction approach seems to depend not only on an awareness of the benefits of consumer input but also on certain organizational conditions. Companies such as Volvo and IKEA empower their front-line workforce, and appear to regard the consumers as interacting partners capable of generating both adaptive and generative knowledge. However, both companies lack appropriate channels for feedback from the interactions at the front-line, and both recognize that this is a problem.

The absence of adequate channels for feeding back information into the company must naturally be a problem, but the situation is even more complex than that. To refer to Senge again, information is only remotely related to learning: reflection is also needed. In consumer markets the front-line people are

those who provide the input into the feedback channel. They are trained in interacting with the end-users in designing the customized offering, but are they also expected to identify and articulate the relevant information for the feedback? Do they have the ability, the time and the authority to do so?

The customer as
co-producer

One way of making this task explicit and legitimate could be to reward such a function, as the Japanese car industry (Womack *et al.*, 1990) at an early stage rewarded their salespeople, who are said to have been paid not only according to the number of cars they sell but also according to the amount of relevant information they feed back into the company.

17

There is generally more provision for organizational learning from and with the end-users. The knowledge that is fed back must be regarded as relevant by the top decision-makers, it must be reflected on and allowed to affect action. But accepting information and experience from the front-line, and interacting with the front-line people with a view to learning, may bring its own problems.

Thus, learning with and from the end-users seems to require not only specific organizational conditions, but also specific attitudes and norms. At this stage the interaction logic seems to generate less benefit than it does in industrial markets. Apart from a better fit, little other gain can yet be seen, especially not in a learning perspective.

It should however be remembered that the benefits of company-consumer interaction and adaptation (i.e. co-production) in industrial markets are the product of the extensive build-up of practical and theoretical knowledge. In consumer markets the interactive approach has only just begun to appear, and there is as yet very little experience on which to draw.

Areas for future experimentation and research

Finally, since some companies at least perceive a potential in the interactive logic, more experimentation and development work is to be expected. And their efforts would of course benefit from more research in this area. As our examples have indicated, most existing interaction depends on IT. As earlier research has shown, if new technology is to be productive it requires new ways of organizing activities, new competences on the part of those involved and new concepts and approaches to understanding and utilizing the possibilities which the new technology opens up (see e.g. David, 1991; Freeman, 1991; Holmström, 1991; Yates, 1991). Thus, according to our cases, both the message and the channel are affected by the new technology. This means that the process of interaction should benefit from more research on the borders between organization and communication, and particularly on the interdependence of IT and organizational structure. Another vital area is the IT effect on the message. As earlier research has demonstrated, the quality of the communication is affected not only by the sender and the receiver, but also by the medium used. And there is still very little knowledge about, among other things, the possible contribution of the new interactive media to a dynamic interaction that promotes generative learning on the part of the producers and new competences among the users.

Notes

1. The IMP-group, also known as the Nordic School of Industrial marketing, includes such well-known names as Johansson, Mattsson, Håkansson and Snehota. Ford, Cunningham and Grabher have also contributed substantially as non-Scandinavians to the development of the interaction approach. For summaries of their work see Axelsson and Easton (1992) and for a more interdisciplinary approach, Grabher (1994).
2. Becker (1965) is very explicit about the consumers' productive role and the postmodernist approach comes to the same conclusion, but from another perspective: the consumers create their own reality (Bouchet, 1994; Firat *et al.*, 1995; Van Paaij, 1993).

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