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Review

The praxis of studying interorganizational practices in B2B marketing and purchasing – A critical literature review

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ABSTRACT

Practice has developed into a key concept in management research, including B2B marketing and purchasing studies. However, the adoption of the term in B2B marketing and purchasing is characterized by some difficulties. Research on B2B practices is growing, but seems marked by fragmentation, inconsistency, and lack of precision among others. Without conceptual consistency and integrity, B2B practice studies are at risk of becoming derailed, compromising the developments of future theory and practice within B2B. In this critical review paper, we therefore seek to create an overview of B2B practice research as perceived through a practice lens. Based on a review of 116 identified practice papers from key B2B journals, we map the topic areas where the practice concept has been applied for investigations, and we also investigate how well the applied practice conceptualization in these papers align with a recognized practice theory conceptualization. We find that the majority of B2B studies align poorly with the three elements of practice: managerial action, habitual behavior, and action-structure duality. Since many of the alignment issues in the review are caused by methodological problems, we propose a series of methodological tools that can provide a more accurate understanding of B2B practices in future research.

1. Introduction

Action and interaction has always been central in research on B2B marketing and purchasing (B2B in the remainder of the paper). In the space between buyer and supplier, without a formal organizational foundation, much business comes down to the actions and interactions of B2B managers on each side of the exchange. The concept of practice has a lot to offer in this context because it deals with how managers develop habitual action patterns that allow them to effectively interact with managers representing customers or suppliers, and create social structures across this formal structural void (Ness, 2009). As a result, their organizations can carry out effective and efficient exchange with customers and suppliers, as well as generating access to key customer and supplier resources that contribute to competitive advantage (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Ness, 2009). B2B practices are therefore also highly critical from a managerial perspective, and studies of such practices often lead to findings of high practical relevance (La Rocca, Hoholm, & Mørk, 2017). Indeed, we argue that one key to strengthened B2B management lies in understanding habitual managerial actions and behaviors, which allows them to be shaped and developed by managers.

Practice studies are proliferating in the broader management field, for example in connection to strategy-as-practice (Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, 2005), learning and communities of practice (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Gherardi, 2006; Nicolini, 2012), and technologies in use (Orlikowski, 2000). These research streams have largely embraced the ontological and methodological challenges of adopting a practice lens on management phenomena. However, a similar conceptual integrity seems to not yet characterize the investigations of practice in the B2B literature, which may therefore be heading in a wrong direction. A recent discussion across separate management research areas portrays this problem (see (Bromiley & Rau, 2016), (Carter, Kosmol, & Kaufmann, 2017) and (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, & Whittington, 2016a). Given the increasing interest in, adoption of, and potential of the practice concept in B2B, this paper illuminates the difficulties and suggest ways to overcome them. Hence, the objective is to critically investigate the state of research into B2B practices in order to recommend new directions.

We contribute by first providing an overview and brief description of the identified B2B topics studied by the use of the term practice, including the applications of the term practice in the reviewed papers. Second, we investigate how researchers understand and apply the concept of practice in the reviewed B2B papers, and compare with practice theory as it has been adopted in the broader management literature. Practice scholars in the broader management field are not

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always entirely aligned in their conceptualization, but some fundamental elements are broadly recognized to be key practice elements (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011), and we use these as the point of reference. We find that the majority of B2B studies are out of alignment with the established practice conceptualization and we explain the details of this misalignment. Most problems are caused by a mismatch between the research problem and applied methods, leading to a second contribution: a detailed discussion and recommendations for altered methods in future B2B practice studies. In the final part, we make a third smaller contribution by highlighting some topics that could benefit from a practice perspective in future B2B studies, also indicating that the practice lens is perhaps not useful for studying all topics. As such, we position the paper both relative to practice research in the broader management field, literature on B2B methodology, and the various identified B2B topics, each with its own stream of research.

A critical review is needed because the applied understanding of a concept within a field of research has a determining effect on theoretical framing, choices of overall research design, data collection methods and study results among others. Without a minimum level of consistency in the use and understanding of key concepts, this important line of research may also come to suffer from methods problems such as proliferation, low nomological validity, construct validity and discriminant validity (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2016). Without some level of shared understanding between B2B practice researchers, as well as attention to how other researchers are investigating this concept, both within and outside B2B, the cumulative research body may develop in an unfortunate way. Understanding the *praxis* (La Rocca et al., 2017), in other words how researcher go about studying practices in practice, is critical to scientific progress. Also, if the B2B community fails to adopt the fundamental ontology of practice, its high potential for creating valuable B2B insights is missed. Hence, our purpose is to create overview of the content and praxis of practice research in B2B, in the process hoping to clean up some of the conceptual problems, thereby paving the way for an improved utilization of the practice concept in B2B research.

We have structured the paper as follows. First, we explain the conceptualization of practice adopted for this review and describe our methodology. Next, we provide an overview of the many different applications of the practice concept in studies of various B2B topics. We also discuss the adopted research praxis in the B2B studies and relate the adopted understanding of the concept to the extant theoretical understanding as portrayed in the broader management literature on practice. Next, we discuss methodological challenges and provide recommendations on how to address them, leading to a methods based future research agenda on B2B practices. Finally, we conclude on the paper and propose a few promising future research topics that could benefit from a practice lens.

2. The concept of practice

Practice theory originates in the work of several classical philosophers and sociologists such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (1969), Michel Foucault (1977), Martin Heidegger (1996), and Anthony Giddens (1984). Their distinct contributions have provided the building blocks that management theorist have used to establish practice studies within the field of management. Although there is no universally accepted definition of practice (Nicolini, 2012), the two following quotes in combination provide a good starting point for understanding the concept of practice. Reckwitz (2002) defines a practice as "*a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, and a background knowledge in the form of understanding*". Focusing more on the structuration element of a practice, Giddens (1984) states that practices are "*social actions recursively producing and reproducing social structures*". The fundamental elements of practice characterizing practice theory in management can be traced in these combined definitions, and are also evident from several seminal works (see (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011); (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Savigny, 2001) and (Whittington, 2006)). These are: 1) *actions* (conscious or unconscious), carried out by individual managers, 2) routinized by repetition and experience, establishing a *habitual* behavior, and 3) *situationally* adapted to and embedded in the social structure in which it is unfolding, while also building or changing the social structure over time (*action-structure duality*). We adopt this three element conceptualization of practice for the review. Below, we explain the three elements and use them as an anchor in the subsequent review.

2.1. Actions

First, human *actions*, or more precisely bundles of actions, are central to the phenomenon of managerial practice. Practice scholars emphasize human agency, and see individual managers from all organizational layers of the company as practitioners (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006). The micro-level activities of managers interacting across the boundaries between organizations are accentuated when the context is buyer-supplier relationships. Practices cannot be something an organization has, but they are constituted by organizational managers' doings (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). They are always related to ways of thinking, feeling, and communicating by social actors (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2010; Nicolini, 2012). As such, they are embodied doings and sayings, and arrays of human activity organized around a practical understanding (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). Doings and sayings are terms used widely in practice theory. Doing refers to any type of action carried out relative to another party (customer or supplier manager in the B2B context) and saying refers to those actions that are specifically communicative.

2.2. Habitual behavior

Second, a practice consist of some degree of routinized behavior, either as the sum of an individual's actions or the unified practices of the broader collective entity of people (Schatzki et al., 2001). Habitual behavior stems from the repetition of actions that previously proved successful, which thereafter are performed effortlessly without further thinking (Hitchings, 2012). Practices are basically routinized sets of bodily activities, which are connected mentally and carried out based on know-how, interpretation of the surroundings, as well certain aims and emotions (La Rocca et al., 2017; Reckwitz, 2002). The underlying knowhow and mental dispositions connecting and ordering these activities are subtle, making them difficult to formulate (Schatzki, 2018). This habitual element of a practice should not be understood as a deterministic mechanism deciding human behavior, but more or as a guidance for how to act. The practical consciousness thereby provides an understanding of which specific actions constitute a practice. It enables one to know how to do or say, how to identify doings or sayings and how to prompt and respond to doings or sayings (Schatzki et al., 2001; Wittgenstein, 1969). Know-how is not something individuals acquire in relation to their role and job title or by reading, hearing or seeing how it is done. The know-how is formatted through doing or experience, where the attempt, correction, and re-doing together forms the underlying understanding of how to go on (Gherardi, 2016). Habits have the benefit of projecting relatively stable behavior over time, while providing room for framed variations and improvisation (Niewöhner & Beck, 2017).

2.3. Action-structure duality

Third, understanding the mutual constitution of recurrent actions and structures are key objectives for practice researchers (Feldman & Worline, 2013). This *duality between action and structure* is captured through three separate dimensions: 1) the social structure, in which the practices unfold, 2) the formal structure, in which the practices are situated, and 3) the situatedness, in which the practices occur. The broader social structure, which guides the practices of individuals, consists of shared understandings, cultural norms and language shared by actors, among others (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Giddens, 1984; Whittington, 2006). However, while practices are guided by structure, they also have a structure-producing quality, where structure is simultaneously established through recurrent actions (Schatzki et al., 2001). Practice theory thereby opposes organization as a steady state, shaped by structures and objects, and instead contemplates the social structure as actively produced and reproduced through recursive actions (Gherardi, 2006). However, organization is more than social structure. Formal rules, structure and strategy also play a central role in guiding the practices of managers. The concept of infrastructure is sometimes used to refer to this aspect of practice. Infrastructure is visible, but often remains relatively invisible in normal use (Shove, Watson, & Spurling, 2015). Finally, despite the repetitiveness and constituting nature of practices, change and adaptation also play roles in practice theory. Repeated habitual actions create stability, but they simultaneously trigger structural changes because practices are not repeated identically (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Managers improvise and adapt their practices to the situation (situated action) and interaction surroundings, which generates new experience and possibly new or altered structures (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Giddens, 1984).

3. Review methodology

In order to provide a comprehensive overview of how practice theory has been used within B2B research, a review process was designed to identify, select and analyze relevant articles.

This process followed the sequence in Fig. 1, where each step created an outcome, which acted as the departure point for the next step. A crucial first step of a systematic review is the design of the review, which includes identifying target journals, search engine, and search method. The journal sample was selected to have both key specialized B2B journals, but also the highest ranking Operations Management and Marketing journals with a high percentage of B2B papers. We also wanted a mix of journals with papers applying both a customer and supplier oriented perspective. To ensure high quality, we excluded journals ranked below 2 by the Chartered Association of Business Schools (see Table 1).

In stage 1, we then made a broad search in the journals, initially retrieving all articles where either "practice" were found in the abstract, indicating that the term practice could be central. The search covered the time period from the beginning of each journal to the end of 2018. Stage 1 led to the identification the papers in the column "all potential articles" (see Table 1). Next, a careful screening of all papers (stage 2) with the purpose of detecting the centrality of "practice", resulted in the numbers in column 4. Here the authors discussed the papers and subsequently assessed qualitatively whether practice was a central concept. Central means that it plays a key role in the argumentation, that it appears recurrently throughout the text, and that it is used explicitly to refer to some underlying properties of an investigated phenomenon. Articles without practice as a central concept were eliminated from further investigation.

The relevant papers were then investigated in-depth in stage 3 for the external-oriented nature of the investigated practices; in other words whether or not the studied practices were oriented towards buyers and/or suppliers and not merely with an internal orientation. This investigation led to the numbers in the right most column in Table 1 and also led to the classification scheme where papers were grouped according to their content (see Table 2). Internal oriented practices were removed for further investigation. The result was 116 articles for the review, which were analyzed in the final step to identify if and how their conceptualization of B2B practice was in correspondence with practice theory.

4. The different topics of B2B practice research

Based on a thorough reading and analysis of the 116 articles, we divided them into categories according to the identified topics of the articles, which are investigated by the use of the practice term. Table 2 provides an overview of the 10 identified categories including subtopics for each category. The categorization process was led by the first author, who read carefully through the papers and took notes on the content of each article. The application of the term practice was also noted for each paper (Table 2, left column shows the category in **bold** and application of the term below in non-bold). An Excel spreadsheet was used for this exercise. Several times in the process, the author team met and discussed the content of the papers. The lead author suggested groupings of the papers into content categories, and these groupings were then discussed and adapted in the meetings. After some rounds of discussion and adaptation the author team agreed on the final content categories. This way the content categories gradually emerged from the analytical process.

Below we provide a brief overview of each category.

4.1. Sales and marketing practices

This category includes applications such as key accounting, customer portfolio or strategic accounts, which cover similar phenomena: organizational management programs with specific practices for developing and maintaining relationships to central customers. A significant part of the articles in this category proposes generic steps for practitioners to adopt, in order to identify, analyze, and develop strategies and capabilities for specific accounts (Ahmad & Buttle, 2001; Ojasalo, 2001; Terho, 2009). The specific managerial practices have further been divided into intra-organizational and inter-organizational alignment, where the internal setup is established before the external engagement begins (Davies & Ryals, 2014; Ming-Huei & Wen-Chiung, 2011; Storbacka, 2012; Töytäri et al., 2011). Examples of more tangible

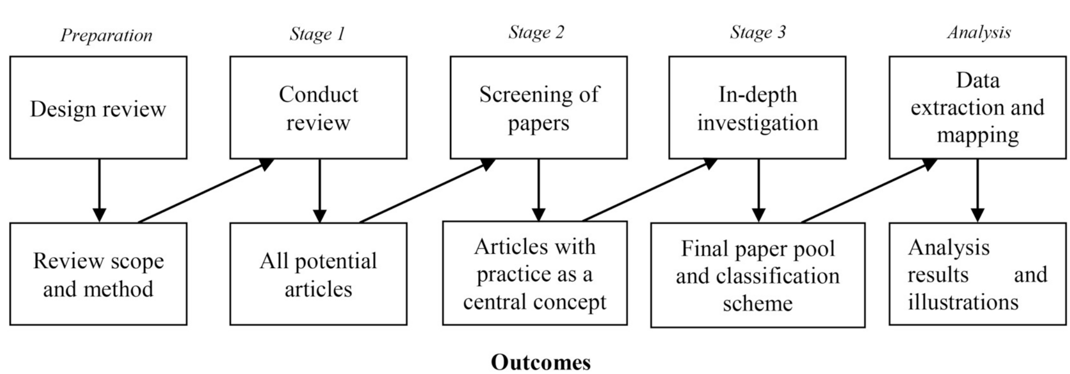

Fig. 1. Review process.

Table 1
The distribution of review articles.

Journal	Ranking (ABS, 2018)	All potential articles	Articles with practice as a central concept	Articles with external (buyer/supplier) focus
Journal of Marketing	4*	139	21	1
Journal of Marketing Research	4*	76	3	0
Industrial Marketing Management	3	449	84	17
Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	2	208	82	28
Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing	2	304	23	8
Journal of Supply Chain Management	3	67	34	15
Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management	2	99	19	10
Journal of Operations Management	4*	273	22	12
Supply Chain Management – An international Journal	3	229	73	25
Total		**1844**	**361**	**116**

practices are the "use of references" for establishing credibility, through personal interaction or published materials (Salminen, 2001; Salminen & Möller, 2006), or pricing practices where "taking advantage of customer needs", "pricing below cost" or "securing excessive profits" are seen as non-ethical in one study (Indounas, 2008). The other large stream within this category is the research of contemporary marketing practices. Here "transactional marketing" is distinguished from "relational marketing", which can be divided into "database", "interaction" and "network marketing" (Coviello et al., 1997; Pels et al., 2009). Consumer oriented firms adopt transactional and database practices, while B2B firms are more focused on interaction and network practices (Covello & Brodie, 2001). Other studies find that the four contemporary marketing practices are applied more in developed countries, while emergent market firms are more network oriented or even applying "low marketing practice" (Dadzie et al., 2008; Pels et al., 2004). Finally, the more relational practices has been linked to leadership style, such as transactional and transformational leadership (Lindgreen et al., 2009).

4.2. Purchasing practices

This section covers practices adopted by buyers relative to suppliers. Purchasing practices have some similarities to supply chain management, integration, and relational practices. Overall, they can be divided into two types. First, a more formalized approach to purchasing, where the exchange is a repeated generic process across all suppliers, built upon standardized procedures and policies. Second are the more specific practices with attention to each specific supplier, covering all the interpersonal and organizational behaviors surrounding the exchange. Some studies are operationally focused and address purchasing practices' effects on performance. Examples are quality control, supplier involvement, and logistics coordination aspects (Rodriguez-Escobar & González-Benito, 2015; Narasimhan & Das, 2001). Other papers investigate relational outcomes of the practices, for example effects on satisfaction (Humphreys, et al., 2008). Here, actions carried out by individuals are in focus, as opposed to broader organizational procedures (Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2016). Some purchasing practices have been investigated empirically, for example "gray procurement" (Zhuang et al., 2014) or "online reverse auctions" (Emiliani, 2004). Two articles study purchasing practices in SMEs, comprehending the underlying rationales of adopted purchasing practices (Ellegaard, 2008; Pressey et al., 2009).

4.3. Sustainable sourcing practices

Sustainable sourcing practices are what companies do in order to enhance sustainability with suppliers. Some focus on logistics and the use of materials, while others focus more on ensuring sustainable supplier operations (Pagell & Wu, 2009). Examples of such practices are certifications, supplier training, codes of conduct combined with rewards and sanctions, use of KPI's, audits, risk assessments and monitoring (Grosvold, Hoejmose, & Roehrich, 2014). Overall, the practices can be divided into supplier assessment and supplier collaboration, which affect both environmental, social, and economic performance (Gimenez & Tachizawa, 2012). Sustainability practices are closely linked to purchasing practices, but with an environmental orientation (Lindgreen et al., 2009).

4.4. Supply chain practices

Supply chain management practices cover all upstream and downstream oriented practices for optimizing the flow of goods and services. There is a strong tendency to search for the best universal practices, in order to increase central performance measures such as quality, efficiency, responsiveness and competitiveness (Tan, 2002). Examples of this performance link could be how joint action and information sharing lead to increased supplier or buyer performance (Zaheer et al., 1998), or the mediating role of strategic supplier partnership and postponement on the positive effect of lean and agile supply chain strategy on responsiveness (Qrunfleh & Tarafdar, 2013). Sometimes supply chain dynamism, information sharing and organizational agility can even improve the supply chain practice itself, and thereby increase delivery performance (Khan et al., 2009; Zhou & Benton, 2007). Strategic supplier and customer relationships have sometimes been constructed as practices through 8-10 items, which together with information sharing and internal variables (e.g. quality, lean practices, postponement, delivery dependability and time to market) constitute the term "supply chain management practice" (Gorane & Kant, 2016; Li et al., 2005; Wong et al., 2005; Wu et al., 2013). Supply chain management practices enhance supply chain integration and competitive capability, which increase overall firm performance (Day & Lichtenstein, 2006; Kim, 2006). Firm performance is also affected by supply chain competence, which is derived from the firm's practice of "exploiting current capabilities", while still "exploring new competences" (Rojo, Llorens-Montes, & Perez-Arostegui, 2016). A mixture of collaborative and process improving practices can be found in connection with category management, which reduces costs, enhances customer loyalty, and increases resource commitment, thereby creating a sustained competitive advantage (Dupre & Gruen, 2006).

4.5. Supplier development practices

This category contains practices implemented by buyers, with the purpose of improving the capabilities of their suppliers. First, this can be seen as a process with assessment of the supplier, commitment building, implementation and follow-up (Hartley & Jones, 1997). Effects of specific development practices have been measured on the sourcing performance of the supplier (Krause & Scannell, 2002; Nagati & Rebolledo, 2013; Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2005). Supplier development practices also positively mediate the effect of strategic purchasing on purchasing performance, which means that plant visits,

Table 2
The 10 identified practice categories.

Category of practice (applications below):	Article references:
Sales and Marketing Practices Management Aligning Practices Key Account Management Sales Force Management Practices Customer Portfolio Management Value-based selling Practices Bonding Practices Reference Practices Pricing Practices Contemporary Marketing Practices - Transactional - Database - Interaction - Network	(Abu Farha & Elbanna, 2018; Ahmad & Buttle, 2001; Coviello & Brodie, 2001; Coviello, Brodie, Danaher, & Johnston, 1997; Dadzie, Johnston, & Pels, 2008; Davies & Ryals, 2014; Indounas, 2008; Lindgreen, Palmer, Wetzels, & Antioco, 2009; Ming-Huei & Wen-Chiung, 2011; Ojasalo, 2001; Pels, Brodie, & Johnston, 2004; Pels, Möller, & Saren, 2009; Reid, Plank, Peterson, & Rich, 2017; Salminen, 2001; Salminen & Möller, 2006; Storbacka, 2012; Terho, 2009; Töytäri, Alejandro, Parvinen, Ollila, & Rosendahl, 2011)
Purchasing Practices Formalized Purchasing Practices Advanced Purchasing Practices Relational Purchasing Supplier Oriented Purchasing Strategic Purchasing Gray Procurement Online Reverse Auctions Supplier Quality Practices	(Ellegaard, 2008; Emiliani, 2004; Humphreys, Williams & Goebel, 2008; Kamann & Bakker, 2004; Kosmol, Reimann, & Kaufmann, 2018; Narasimhan & Das, 2001; Pemer & Skjølsvik, 2016; Pressey, Winklhofer, & Tzokas, 2009; Rodríguez-Escobar & González-Benito, 2015; Zhuang, Herndon, & Tsang, 2014)
Sustainable Sourcing Practices CSR Practices Sustainable SCM Practices Supplier Assessment Supplier Collaboration Environmental SC Practices Environmental Management Practices	(Gimenez & Tachizawa, 2012; Golicic & Smith, 2013; Grosvold, Hoejmose & Roerich, 2014; Huq, Chowdhury & Klassen, 2016; Li, Rao, Ragu-Nathan, & Ragu-Nathan, 2005; Lindgreen et al., 2009; Pagell & Wu, 2009; Pekovic, Rolland, & Gatignon, 2016; Tong et al., 2018; 2018; Villena & Gioia, 2018)
Supply Chain Practices Supplier location Vendor Managed Inventory Information Sharing Supplier Performance Evaluation, Category Management Communication, joint activities, and incentive alignment Best SCM Practices Delivery Practices TQM Practices	(Andersen & Skjoett-Larsen, 2009; Basnet, Corner, Wisner, & Tan, 2003; Day & Lichtenstein, 2006; Dupre & Gruen, 2006; Gorane & Kant, 2016; Khan, Bakkappa, Bhimaraya, & Sahay, 2009; Kim, 2006; Pradabwong, Braziotis, Tannock, & Pawar, 2017; Qrunfleh & Tarafdar, 2013; Tan, 2002; Theodorakioglou, Gotzamani, & Tsiolvas, 2006; Wong, Arlbjørn, & Johansen, 2005; Wu, Daniel, Hinton, & Quintas, 2013; Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998; Zhou & Benton, 2007)
Supplier Development Practices Supplier development activities/practices Basic Moderate Advanced Quality management practices Supplier management practices	(Bygballe, 2017; Forker, Ruch, & Hershauer, 1999; Hartley & Jones, 1997; Krause & Scannell, 2002; Liao, Hong, & Rao, 2010; Nagati & Rebolledo, 2013; Park & Hartley, 2002; Pulles, Veldman, Schiele, & Sierksma, 2014; Sancha, Longoni & Gimenez, 2015; Sánchez-Rodríguez, 2009; Sánchez-Rodríguez, Hemsworth, & Martínez-Lorente, 2005)
Relationship Practices Relational practices CRM practices Guanxi practices Social bonding practices Asian supply chain management practices Interactional and procedural practices	(Ata & Toker, 2012; Buttle, Ahmad, & Aldlaigan, 2002; Chavez, Fynes, Gimenez, & Wiengarten, 2012; Chen, Huang, & Sternquist, 2011; Emberson & Storey, 2006; Filiatrault & Lapierre, 1997; Huikkola, Ylimäki, & Kohtamäki, 2013; Jia, Gao, Lamming, & Wilding, 2016; Kohtamäki & Bourlakis, 2012; Leung, Chan, Lai, & Ngai, 2011; Tidström & Rajala, 2016)
Integration Practices External integration practices Customer cooperation Supplier cooperation Process integration practices Product integration practices Information sharing Incentive alignment Joint decision making Integrative practices	(Ahmed, Kristal, Pagell, & Gattiker, 2017; Das, Narasimhan, & Talluri, 2006; Droge, Jayaram, & Vickery, 2004; Huo, Qi, Wang, & Zhao, 2014; Molina, Llorens-Montes, & Ruiz-Moreno, 2007; Pramatari, 2007; Vallet-Bellmunt & Rivera-Torres, 2013; van Donk & van der Vaart, 2004; Wiengarten, Humphreys, Cao, Fynes, & McKittrick, 2010)
Co-creation Practices Linking practices Materializing practices Institutionalizing practices Co-innovation practices Innovative supply chain practices Black and grey box integration	(Ageron, Lavastre, & Spalanzani, 2013; Barqawi, Syed, & Mathiassen, 2016 Breidbach & Maglio, 2016; Kohtamäki & Rajala, 2016; Koufteros, Cheng & Lai, 2007; Lombardo & Cabiddu, 2017; Marcos-Cuevas, Nätti, Palo, & Baumann, 2016; Quesada, Syamil, & Doll, 2006; Wang, Hsiao, Yang, & Hajli, 2016)

(*continued on next page*)

Table 2 (*continued*)

Category of practice (applications below):	Article references:
Supplier involvement	
Recurrent release practice	
Communication Practices	(Ballantyne, Frow, Varey, & Payne, 2011; Bolat, Kooli, & Wright, 2016; Mason & Leek, 2012; Salomonson, Åberg, & Allwood, 2012; Wang, Li, & Huang, 2012)
Announcement practices	
Social media practices	
Customer service practices	
Communicative practices	
Value proposition as communication	
Multiple Practices	(Awuah, 2008; Campos & Vazquez-brust, 2016; Carter, 2000; Ellegaard, 2009; Ellram, Zsidisin, Siferd, & Stanly, 2002; Grönroos & Helle, 2012; Humphreys, Williams & Goebel, 2008; Kang, Wu, Hong, Park, & Park, 2014; Kumra, Agndal, & Nilsson, 2012; Maglaras, Bourlakis, & Fotopoulos, 2015; Mahapatra, Narasimhan, & Barbieri, 2010; Peters & Pressey, 2016; Ribeiro, Brashear, Monteiro, & Damazio, 2009; Shi, Koh, Baldwin, & Cucchiella, 2012; Tidström & Rajala, 2016; Wiengarten, Pagell, & Fynes, 2013; Zimmermann & Foerstl, 2014)
Coordination, monitoring and control practices	
Strategic cost management practices	
Commercial practices	
Supplier oriented purchasing practices	
Customer orientation practices	
Marketing relationship practices	
Open book practices	
Lean and green purchasing practices	
Collaborative practices	
Coopetition practices	

rewards, training, information sharing and involvement, increase purchasing performance when strategic purchasing is applied (Sánchez-Rodríguez, 2009). Rewarding suppliers when they respond to requests improves the direct allocation of physical and innovative resources from the supplier (Pulles et al., 2014). Finally, mimetic pressure, where firms are imitating successful competitors in the industry, is clearly the most effective enabler of supplier development practices (Sancha, Longoni, & Giménez, 2015).

4.6. Relationship practices

Guanxi practices, such as social favors or gift giving, are examples of one-way relationship practices that increase satisfaction and thereby enhance trust, which improves outcomes in negotiations (Chen et al., 2011; Leung et al., 2011). Another relational practice is the adoption of Customer Relationship Management systems, where the organization implements specific customer-centric and operational practices, which also increase customer satisfaction (Ata & Toker, 2012). Relation specific adaptions and investments are treated as practices, which can build both social bonds between parties or establish exit barriers and dependency, which both strengthen the relationship (Buttle et al., 2002; Jia et al., 2016). Another benefit of investments with specific suppliers is the derived knowledge sharing and learning, which further strengthen the relationship (Huikkola et al., 2013; Kohtamäki & Bourlakis, 2012). Knowledge sharing and relational learning are crucial elements in project-oriented companies, where the individual level of the relationship is regarded critical (Emberson & Storey, 2006; Filiatrault & Lapierre, 1997).

4.7. Integration practices

Practices within this category involves close collaboration and a high degree of knowledge transfer between buyer and supplier, often revolving around supply chain optimization and operational improvements. These practices can be highly process oriented, ranging from sharing of production plans and inventory levels through joint EDI, to packaging customization and logistical optimization (Vallet-Bellmunt & Rivera-Torres, 2013; van Donk & van der Vaart, 2004). The technological development has opened up for alternative tools for sharing information, where traditional ordering and VMI have been substituted with web-based platforms and RFID collaboration, providing high-quality, detailed information (Pramatari, 2007). The argument is that sharing of information, costs, risks and benefits, combined with a large degree of joint decision making, lead to improved operational performance for both parties (Wiengarten et al., 2010). The external integration with buyers and suppliers during design of new products or processes can also reduce the time to market and increase responsiveness, which increases market share and financial performance (Droge et al., 2004).

4.8. Co-creation practices

Co-creation practices involve a high level of cooperation on developing and/or improving value, which is beyond the capabilities of a single organization. These can be operationally oriented, where innovative solutions are implemented in order to improve supply chain processes (Ageron et al., 2013). However, new product development tend to be the central element in co-creation practices, where suppliers can assist the buyer in different stages (gray box integration), or the supplier can engineer whole components or products (black box integration) (Koufteros, Edwin Cheng, & Lai, 2007). This has been found to improve on-time delivery, quality and reduce costs of the supplier (Quesada et al., 2006). Co-creation in B2B settings is a highly researched phenomenon, with a distinction between coproduction practices for specific value propositions and the practices orchestrating the value-creating collaboration (Kohtamäki & Rajala, 2016). Online communities is an interesting example of how co-creation practices are adopted in order to open up product boundaries (Wang et al., 2016). However, traditional practices such as phone and teleconferencing are still widely used in this interaction (Breidbach & Maglio, 2016).

4.9. Communication practices

This diverse category contains communicative practices, where there is a sender and a receiver in the form of the buyer and supplier. Here, the practice aspect is located in the communicative part of the interaction, regarding the message sent and how it is being sent, between not only individuals but also between organizations. This can be the announcement of rewards or punishment to distributors (Wang et al., 2012), or reciprocal value propositions, where one party proposes a mutually binding promise in order to increase exchange activity and relational development (Ballantyne et al., 2011). It can also be practices at the organizational level, such as specific social marketing practices (market sensing, managing relationship, branding or content development) (Bolat et al., 2016), or the employee's practices in customer service (support, inform and explain, mirror mood, joke, confirm agreement) (Salomonson et al., 2012). It has also been investigated how contextual factors (time, space, actors and tasks) affect communication practices in the interaction between buyer and suppliers (Mason & Leek, 2012).

4.10. Multiple practices

This last category includes articles adopting a mixture of the practices mentioned above, where the individual practices cannot be isolated. These articles investigate multiple practices and thereby have a wider scope for researching the phenomena, for example the overlap between environment orientation and purchasing (Shi et al., 2012) or the synergies of lean and sustainability (Campos & Vazquez-brust, 2016). Purchasing and supply chain management also possess a certain degree over overlap. In this area, the relational aspect of knowledge sharing and joint NPD, compared to the non-relational practices such as supplier selection and assessment, have a stronger impact on buying firm performance (Zimmermann & Foerstl, 2014). Taken even further, it is proven that a focus on short term strategic cost management practices excludes relationship building, which damages performance in the longer run (Ellram et al., 2002). In this category, the width of included practices is often extended, while sacrificing the depth in the investigation (e.g. Maglaras et al., 2015). An example could be customer-orientation practices, where the involvement of customers, social interaction and common resource utilization have positive impacts on the customers bringing future business and referencing (Awuah, 2008). It can also be seen in supply risk management where relational aspects, such as the use of personal network and a focus on fairness and loyalty, combined with supply chain practices like local sourcing and supplier visits, reduce losses and secure stable supplies (Ellegaard, 2008). Or open book practices, where information sharing differs according to the stage of ordering (Kumra et al., 2012). Outsourcing also crosses categories, as coordination practices are combined with control, monitoring and sanctioning practices in order to enhance outsourcing performance (Kang et al., 2014; Wiengarten et al., 2013).

5. The use of the concept practice in B2B research

Practices are studied by the use of surveys, qualitative/case studies and conceptual/review methods across the 10 categories in Table 2. There are minor differences among the methods applied between the groups with practice as a key construct versus those where practice is secondary, but overall the distribution is similar in both groups (see Table 3).

Based on a detailed investigation of the 116 papers, we find that a relatively high percentage applies practice as a secondary concept. Hence, the concept is important enough to hold a central role in a paper, but it is not core to the theoretical and analytical development in the paper. For example, in a quantitative paper investigating a causal model, practice would be a key concept if it is a key variable in the model, thereby requiring a solid conceptualization and operationalization as well as accounts of its hypothesized connections to other variables. Otherwise it is not the concept of practice that drives the research and sets the structure for the paper (secondary concept). In the secondary category, the topic of the research (e.g. supplier development, value co-creation or supply chain management), typically forms the backbone for the argumentation and flow through the paper, and creates linkages and cross citations to research on similar topics. In secondary concept papers, practice is merely an additional element of the research, used in combination with other concepts for explaining the phenomenon. The grouping in key and secondary concept papers were carried out initially by the lead author, and then checked by the coauthors, leading to a joint discussion and understanding of this distinction and the resultant grouping of papers (we note that this grouping is obviously arbitrary to some extent).

Table 3
Adoption of "practice" as key or secondary concept.

	Practice as a key concept (n = 69)	Practice as secondary concept (n = 47)
Survey	37	23
Qualitative/Case study	25	22
Conceptual/Review	7	2
Practice theory	7	0

The point with making this distinction is that with practice as a key concept, researchers are obliged, at least to some extent, to account for or relate to the conceptual nature and foundation of practice, whereas demands in the secondary concept category can be less stringent. Having practice as a key concept would arguably require some level of attention to practice theory as it has developed in the field of management. However, among the 69 key concept articles, only seven papers refer to practice theory. We note that some papers without practice theory references actually study practices. Overall however, we can conclude that conceptual consistency is quite low with a high percentage of key papers actually not studying practices (partly or fully) when compared to the conceptualization in Section 2. This trend can spur further risks of disagreements and increased fragmentation. Moreover, missed opportunities for cross study synergies and drawing full use of the concept seem inevitable.

Among the papers using practice as a secondary concept, none refer to practice theory. Based on our reading of these papers we see three main ways the practice concept is brought to use: 1) as reference to praxis, 2) as a synonym, or 3) as a higher order variable. First, researchers in the secondary category sometimes use practice as a broad concept when investigating what managers or companies actually “do” relative to buyers or suppliers, corresponding to a “praxis” understanding (La Rocca et al., 2017). Second, practice often seems to be used as a synonym for something else when the conceptualization might not be entirely clear, for example for the terms approach, strategy, procedure, policy or initiative. Third, some studies operate with overall higher order variables, composed of many lower order variables. Such studies may suffer from problems with finding a suitable term that covers the exact conceptual domain. Here, practice seems to have a certain appeal as an applied term. Although demands for conceptual clarity are lower in the secondary category, such use of practice as a garbage can concept may still contribute to conceptual confusion and fragmentation, when the applied practice logic is not aligned with the established dominant understanding in the literature. In the following section, we elaborate upon the more exact alignment between the established field of practice theory and the B2B literature.

6. Alignment between practice theory and B2B research

Table 4 shows the number of papers in each content category (see Table 2 for details) that are misaligned with the three features of practice theory (described in subsections 2.1–2.3), with the numbers in parenthesis showing those papers where the concept is primary.

Below, we discuss the alignment of the reviewed B2B research with the three features of practice as well as the consequences. The evaluation and discussion of the reviewed B2B practice papers takes place with reference to the practice theoretical conceptualization in Section 2.

6.1. Actions by individual managers

Only 20 of the 116 articles investigate practices as actions carried out by individual managers (see subsection 2.1 for details on this feature of practice). Some of these studies rely on practice theory, for example research on supplier-switching (Bygballe, 2017), coopetition at multiple organizational levels (Tidström & Rajala, 2016), or B2B value co-creation (Marcos-Cuevas, Nätti, Palo & Baumann, 2016). These papers are examples of how practice theory and a focus on action are highly useful for dissecting complex processes and social

Table 4
The degree of misalignment with the three features of practice theory.

Category of practice: Total #, (# primary term)	Actions	Habitual	Action-structure
Sales and Marketing Practices Total = 18 (11)	16 (11)	13 (9)	11 (8)
Purchasing Practices Total = 10 (5)	5 (3)	4 (2)	6 (2)
Sustainable Sourcing Practices Total = 10 (4)	10 (4)	10 (4)	7 (4)
Supply Chain Practices Total = 17 (9)	17 (9)	16 (9)	14 (9)
Supplier Development Practices Total = 11 (5)	11 (5)	10 (5)	9 (3)
Relationship Practices Total = 11 (7)	6 (4)	4 (1)	3 (1)
Integration Practices Total = 9 (6)	9 (6)	9 (6)	9 (6)
Co-development Practices Total = 9 (8)	5 (4)	5 (4)	4 (3)
Communication Practices Total = 5 (3)	3 (1)	4 (2)	2 (0)
Multiple Practices Total = 16 (11)	14 (9)	15 (10)	14 (9)

phenomena. The practice-based lens allows the authors to contribute to existing theory within the field, by analyzing the social practices unfolding among individual managers. Some studies provide interesting insights into practices, but without actually referring to practice theory. For example, Buttle et al. (2002) study how companies bond with their customers. They report on an in-depth investigation of actual actions by individual managers aimed at creating and maintaining customer relationships.

However, the majority of papers actually study something else than practice as individual managerial action. Most of these investigations instead deal with practice as an organizational level phenomenon. Scholars tend to either 1) mix-up the action dimension of a practice with standardized systemic characteristics at the organizational level, or 2) mistake practice with organizational structure. In the first group, the term practice is applied to describe a formal procedure or policy, a general management system or any other program implemented at the organizational level. This praxis is prevalent, for example in studies of LEAN, supplier certification in the supply chain, IT systems, or relationship specific investments, all dealing with organizational level phenomena. Some papers in this group seek to prescribe best "practices" that, when combined specifically, will lead to advantageous outcomes (e.g. competitive advantage or efficiency). Such higher order variables, most often a mixture of different types of the organizational level phenomena, fail to capture the action characteristic inevitably tied to using the concept practice. Many of these papers have a strong normative agenda, where the practice label constitutes a suitable concept for capturing something that desirably can be implemented by managers and organizations. However, many papers only look at intentions and perceptions of these "practices", which covers what the actors want to do, but are silent regarding what they actually do. This forward looking tendency fails to capture the historical experience based ties associated with a practice. Similarly, some papers use the term practice when actually discussing strategies or tactics, but they do not capture the actual execution of these, which makes the notion of practice inappropriate. Finally, quite a few studies mistake practices for formal structure, for example organizational units such as steering groups. However, having a formal structure only denotes that employees are placed together with some purpose of action, not that B2B action of any type is going to result from this grouping.

Overall, it is clear from these studies that research in B2B has been overly focused on organizational level phenomena, while only a few researchers have studied managerial actions. When B2B scholars study strategies, policies, procedures, documents, programs, or even IT systems and treat them as practices, they miss the chance to understand the actual doings and sayings of B2B managers relative to suppliers and customers. The importance of managerial agency and how it directs action is then left in the dark. Organizations may provide the foundation for practice, but they cannot retain customers, build relationships, communicate or integrate processes among other key B2B actions; managers have to do that. Action is particularly important in this context because B2B procedures rarely span across the organizational divide between buyer and supplier, but managerial actions can.

6.2. Routinized by repetition leading to habitual behavior

There is a large variation in terms of how aligned the research is with this feature of practice theory (see subsection 2.2 for details on this feature of practice). In our optics, only 21 out of 116 papers in the paper sample devote adequate attention to the habitual element of a practice. The remaining papers fail to account for whether these actions can be repeated in a routinized fashion as the result of know-how obtained through experience (see subsection 2.2). If not, the actions are not habitual and therefore not practices. Based on our analysis, the papers that fail to cover habitus can be divided into two groups, where the habitual dimension is studied as either 1) frequently occurring similar actions or 2) generic tactics. First, there seems to be a tendency to assume in many papers, both qualitative and quantitative, that repetitive actions is equivalent to habitual behavior. Even though there is a repetitive element in a practice, simple counting of observed or surveyed actions is not sufficient to cover this dimension. Otherwise, how will researchers know when managers have accumulated experience based knowhow enough to habitually carry out a practice? Some survey studies seeking generalizability and a high degree of managerial prescription, mistake deliberate organizational *tactics* with practices. This happens for example when group comparisons are made regarding different ways of approaching marketing, or when researchers are looking at how different strategies and tactics of supplier development affect purchasing performance. Even though a practice is produced and re-produced by repetition, frequency does not capture the action-pattern constituting a practice.

In order to capture the habitual element, researchers instead need to look across the actions and follow managers in action over time, in order to identify the underlying "know-how" guiding the separate actions (this challenge is discussed in subsection 7.2). Among the studies successfully overcoming this challenge, is Mason and Leek (2012), who take a longitudinal approach, being attentive to the action patterns carried out by individual actors, thereby capturing how practices develop over time. Lombardo and Cabiddu (2017) delve into the complexity of the habitual element, but also discuss how researchers can actively use it for explaining the phenomenon of interest. While habitus exists at the individual level, it is also the product of and the steering mechanism for socialization and embeddedness within a field, in this case a professional field (e.g. engineering). Other investigations indicate a focus on learning and routinization, which also has the habitual element similar to practice theory, but tend to remain at the organizational level. For instance, Hartley and Jones (1997), emphasize that implementation of new practices requires behavioral change, which takes time and involves unlearning of old (organizational) practices before new practices can be adopted. An inherited component of a practice is also visible in culture comparison research (Jia et al., 2016). Here, culture is guiding the organizational behavior, which explains why two companies adopting the same policy of procedure ends up with a completely different implementation.

Second, some studies are attempting to uncover procedures and ways of doing that can be generalized and transferred to other actors. These papers are found both in the individual and organizational level paper piles. This focus on generic tactics, opens up a risk of mistaking unconscious habitual behavior, with deliberate generic actions and ways of organizing. It is also a fundamental simplification of practice studies. Identified recipes can be the starting point, but they are not necessarily deterministic of behavior. Some of these studies can be found in the relationship practices category (see Table 2), for example seeking to identify specific relational practices adopted in certain stages of a management process. These generic practices will nurture the relationship, but the specificity within the practices is not elaborated upon, which leaves the reader with a recipe for relationship building, but a minimum of know-how on actually carrying out these practices. By not paying attention the operational level, where relationship phenomena often evolve, nuances are lost and the study cannot account for practices. Other papers present a much more comprehensive account, especially for how individual managers behave. However, the habitual element is frequently difficult to detect, which makes the research highly descriptive in some areas. Finally, some articles immerse themselves into one specific practice (e.g. Social Bonding, (Buttle et al., 2002)). The process of how this practice unfolds is very detailed and the elaboration of the mechanisms in play is also thorough, making this one of the few successful studies in this category.

Generally there is a tendency among the papers to uncover recipe type practices, for example by asking if an organization has this or that practice, which can lead to desired relational outcomes, such as improved satisfaction, enhanced trust or stronger capabilities. This outcome-based focus dominates in the supply chain papers in the sample. Here, the goal is to setup an organizational structure that will lead to a more efficient supply chain. Even though some of this research remains at the organizational level, an even larger issue is this deterministic approach to practice-based research. The value of practice theory is not attributed to the causality between certain practices and organizational outcomes. Instead, practice-based studies should enable the reader to understand the process of how the practices actually unfolds in the complex situations in which they are enacted. While this is visible in the discursive stream of research focusing on the constituting process of communication, other areas of B2B research, such as sustainability, SCM, supplier development and integration practices are overall less attentive to how the practices unfolds from a process perspective. The consequences of the two issues raised above is that research has been concentrating on identifying recipe type practices or the frequency with which a practice occurs, but it is not known if these “practices” are habitual and therefore they may not be typical of B2B behavior or widespread actual behavior among managers. From a managerial perspective, one implication is that executives cannot be sure if their managers actually have the knowledge based experience to repeat these actions in the future.

6.3. Situated action-structure duality

Out of the 116 sampled papers, 37 papers account at least to some extent for the interplay between action and structure, although the degree to which this practice element is accommodated, varies greatly across the papers (see subsection 2.3 for details on this feature of practice). Among the papers that account for this element, Bygballe (2017) applies a process view, and investigates how the practice of supplier switching is unfolding. The study accounts for the specific managerial actions that constitute the overall practices, and even more importantly, the state of the buyer-supplier relationship, in which the practice takes place. There is also a clear focus on how these practices lead to either a stabilization of the new relationship, or a restoration phase of the existing relationship (Bygballe, 2017). In general, not just action but also social structure, is recognized and accounted for fully or partly in the 37 papers. Structure can be both formal rules and policies, but also the informal social structure among the actors, (e.g. (Kohtamäki & Rajala, 2016)). Among the latter type, we find research focused on Guanxi, where the managerial action and habitual element are included as central concepts, derived from the underlying culture, which functions as a social structure. In some studies, the social relationship is the foundation for Guanxi practices (Chen et al., 2011), or reversely in other studies, the relationship is the outcome of certain Guanxi practices (Leung et al., 2011).

Several papers, particularly survey based investigating causalities, only cover one move in the action-structure duality. The adoption of this scope, where structure is either seen as the antecedent or the outcome of certain actions, lead to relevant and interesting findings. These papers adopt one of the most important notions from the practice ontology, namely the recursive nature of the action-structure duality. Organizational structures may serve as the foundation for B2B action, but managerial agency is equally important in determining if and when certain actions will be carried out. Reversely, managerial actions also erect new structures that can guide future action. Some studies cover this relationship by introducing practice as a mediator between some structural variable and performance, thereby demonstrating a stronger effect when practices are involved (e.g. (Qrunfleh & Tarafdar, 2013)). While this element is covered to some extent, it is also clear that very few papers cover the full back and forth recursive movement between action and structure, which is typical of real practice research. Such a focus requires a longitudinal research design and only very few of the sampled B2B papers to date have applied such a design.

Expanding the discussion to include the situatedness of action reveals some interesting additional findings, often connected to methodological challenges. Covering the situatedness, while accounting for the action-structure duality, is a challenging task, and papers tend to position themselves on a continuum. In one end, some papers (typically quantitative) reduce the focus to causal explanations, with limited attention to the underlying dynamics and situatedness, missing details on how managers adapt to specific situations. In the other end, papers (typically qualitative) describe the context and situation in depth, but fail to account for the action-structure mechanisms. However, papers in both ends of the continuum fail to fully capture practices. Only a few researchers successfully achieve a balance, taking a holistic view of the phenomena, while still being attentive to the mechanism steering the process.

Quantitative research tend to zoom in on the recursive mechanism, but the situatedness is frequently unaccounted for. This point is even amplified when authors takes an eclectic approach to which variables to include, and thereby fail to account for the specificity of the single instances. Control variables are not covering situatedness well and when the research design is deductive, the managerial action in its particular situation remains unaccounted for. Such research may be very interesting and contribute, but it is not really practice based. Qualitative papers sometimes manage to provide compelling insights into both action-structure mechanisms and practice situatedness (see for example (Emberson & Storey, 2006)). Other qualitative papers however, are overly descriptive in their account of practices. These papers provide extensive accounts of how actors go about acting in different B2B situations, often involving specific procedures, resources or IT means. However, these papers also frequently fail to account for recursiveness in terms of how structures enable action or emerge from action. They therefore suffer from the same misalignment with the fundamentals of practice as the quantitative papers mentioned above. Looking across the sample, the incomplete account of recursiveness, which characterizes many B2B papers, means that actions and structures are too often seen as separate entities. The dynamic interplay between action and structure as emerging rather than set or given entities is not illuminated leading to possibly faulty understandings of what actually goes on in the B2B boundaries between organizations and what social structures have actually been erected as a result over time. B2B research risks assuming particular actions given observed structures or vice versa.

7. B2B practice research - Methodological considerations and recommendations

Although the term practice has been adopted in a relatively high number of B2B studies, there is still room for being more ambitious when we compare to other fields of management and organizational research, some of which have adopted the practice ontology to a larger extent than B2B. The practice concept is suitable any time managerial action is required to engage with suppliers or customers on B2B markets. However, the *methodological implications* from adopting a practice lens are less clear and many of the misalignment issues in our review are caused by methodological shortcomings. In order to advance research into B2B practices, researchers therefore need to expand and sharpen the methodological tool box. Below, we discuss and evaluate the methodological challenges and opportunities, connected to studying each of the three elements of practice in the B2B context (see details on the elements in subsections 2.1–2.3). We also provide various recommendations for expanding the methodological tool box to address these challenges. The discussion and recommendations are based partly on notable contributions mainly from outside B2B, and partly on our own extensive experience with the suggested methods.

7.1. Methods applied for studying micro-level actions

The sensitivity to micro level action is central to studies of practice. However, much B2B research remains at the organizational level, as illustrated in this paper. Shedding light on procedures, programs, strategies, or policies reveal little of what managers actually do when they confront suppliers or customers. B2B therefore needs to adopt a methodological toolbox that can capture managers' actions. Looking across to adjacent fields where practice ontology has been thoroughly incorporated, it is apparent that B2B research must to a much larger extent adopt observation as a core data collection method (for a key example from outside B2B see (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008)). Observational methods allow researchers to study the actual doings and sayings of managers. The observations can be of sales meetings, negotiation sessions, joint product development workshops, problem-solving episodes or any other type of B2B interaction. Observations also allow the direct study of interaction between representatives from both the buyer and supplier organization. It is not sufficient to use observations as supplementary data, observations should instead be the primary source of inquiry. Despite known obstacles associated with observational methods such as their time consumption, access to the field, data asphyxiation, and lack of control, they are imperative to practice studies. The observations can then be supported by interviews, during which the researcher refers to observed action and seeks to understand the motives, the pattern and the history of why an individual carries out certain practices. La Rocca et al. (2017) also recommend more advanced forms of interviewing in the study of B2B practices.

We also recommend shadowing (Czarniawska, 2007; McDonald & Simpson, 2014), as an extended version of observation, where researchers follow particular B2B managers in their everyday activity over time. Shadowing creates insights into those practices that occur not just in planned encounters such as meetings, but also outside of these encounters (Czarniawska, 2007). Key B2B practices may occur outside of the formal encounters subject to planned observations, and shadowing allows the researcher to explore such practices. Shadowing also provides more depth, breadth and accuracy to observations of habitual behavior and it provides holistic insights into the meaning and intention of the observed action. By combining observation with ongoing questioning, which is carried out in the process of shadowing, the researcher gains rich data on in-situ practices. Shadowing combined with interviewing can also generate insights into what managers intentionally choose not to do, something that is difficult to capture through conventional methods.

For the study of practice types such as communications, relationships, purchasing and sales/marketing practices (see Table 2), we suggest the study of electronic communications (see for example (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994)). B2B managers' sayings relative to other B2B managers often occur through e-mails and studies of such texts would allow precise insights into sayings. We also simply urge researchers to be more stringent in the adoption of concepts. If something under study is a strategy or procedure then that should be the adopted term. Finally, B2B researchers could also be more considerate in choices of research design. Some data collection methods fit better with particular research problems than others and our study has demonstrated that certain designs may have a poor fit with practice studies.

7.2. Methods for capturing the habitual dimension

The methodological challenges expand further because a practice is more than a single action set, it is a *habitual* saying or doing. It possesses some degree of habitual element, which emerges over time and involves a certain level of experience based know-how. This habitual element is difficult to capture for researchers. It may require sincere immersion into the field of study and little distance to the individuals involved (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008). Since individuals can rarely fully account for the knowhow and mental dispositions connecting and ordering these actions, the single interview, regardless of how advanced the interviewing technique, is unlikely to uncover habitus. Time is highly important here, although the measuring of action frequencies is equally ineffective since the actual internalization of a practice cannot be gauged by numbers of repetitions. Longitudinal research is one way of capturing the emergence and routinization of a practice (Pettigrew, 1990)). The required length of a study is phenomenon dependent. If the research is concerned with cultural issues, such as identity or Guanxi, longer periods of data collection are needed compared to research regarding more temporary constructs, such as sales or purchasing practices. However, studying multiple interaction episodes is a necessity for practice-based studies. Ideally, the habitual dimension should be investigated through a process research design, where observations are combined with in-depth interviewing of the involved managers. This way managers can be exposed to their repetitive behavior and inquiries regarding their grounds and intentionality can be assessed. Intentionality is a main factor in these considerations, where a practice possesses some degree of intentionality and deliberate action directed towards specific ends. While an action is situated in time and space, a practice is over time stabilized through repetition. Both the deviation and the consistency in individuals' actions are a central part of practice-based research.

For the habitual element of practice, the increased adoption of ethnographic methods is recommended (see for example (Schatzki, 2006)), as a substitute or at least a supplement to the retrospective accounts based on interviews, prevalent in the case studies from this review. The underlying argument here is that practices are not free-floating and easily transferable. They are specific to the actors and their contextualized ways of carrying them out (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, & Whittington, 2016b). This assumption implies that the tacitness of practices can only be illuminated through practice (research experience), which complicates the process of acquiring and transferring the results of practice-based studies (Langley, 1999). The researcher may have to emerge into the phenomenon of interest in order to create an instrumental knowledge and make this knowledge accessible for an audience (the practitioners). Although habitus studies are difficult to carry out, it is highly critical for the broader managerial implications that a chosen combined research design can determine whether or not an action is at once repetitive, intentional, routinized and know-how based, or simply based on situational stimuli or executive directives for example.

7.3. Methods for shedding light on the interplay between action and structure

Several of the reviewed papers investigate how practices are affecting either the social or formal structure of the relationship between the buyer and supplier. However, we perceive a limited scope of existing investigations in two ways. First, scholars are often only interested in one of the effects – action or structure. The papers rarely incorporate the interplay of how both structures and actions change over time. Secondly, scholars often take a partial view of the organizations, in terms of limiting the scope of study. This could be the sales studies only being concerned with the sales functions, the supply chain management studies being limited to the operational level, or the relationship studies only focusing on either the interpersonal level or the organizational level. Future research should take a more holistic approach to investigate the interplay between action and structure. This could be broadening out the focus for example to how practices at the executive level create structural changes downwards at the operational level, or how employees' practices over time formally manifest upwards in the buyer-supplier relationship. Broadening the scope will also prevent a sole focus on pre-identified formal structures and allow researchers to better discover social structures, which are often hidden beneath the surface of organizations. It is advised that researchers do not make theoretically informed a priori exclusions of certain types of activities, by predefining areas of interest as if the investigated relationship is given, when the aim is to research how it develops and emerges over time (Kjellberg & Helgesson, 2007). The broadened scope could include incorporating document data into practice-based research. Formal structure are best covered through the materialization of action in meeting minutes, organizational charts and strategy documents. Accessing management IS systems may also prove valuable in shedding light on structures that guide actions. Documentation studies, combined with observations and interviews, will enable researcher to provide a much more holistic account of the duality between action and structure. Document data are already prevalent in B2B, but often as secondary support data for primary data of other types and frequently with only partial coverage, often due to the difficulties associated with gaining organizational access.

In addition, we propose that future research of B2B practices must adopt process methods to a much larger extent (for an overview see (Langley, 1999)). Time and history are pivotal aspects if researchers seek to understand practices. Such methods, for example combining serial observations of individual B2B managers in interaction with other B2B managers, with interviews with the same key managers at certain intervals, can uncover the back and forth recursiveness between action and structure. Barley and Tolbert's (1997) seminal paper on studying structuration can be used as inspiration. Such process studies can create a deeper understanding of how the practice emerges over time combined with the structuration element. We observe that the majority of the review articles adopts methods, which cannot adequately account for this dynamic action-structure duality. Looking across to neighboring fields such as strategy and IS, process studies occupy the most dominant position in empirical practice studies, and the same movement needs to take place in research of B2B practices. Alternatively, researchers can study adjacent phenomena associated with fewer methodological challenges, for example "routines" (see e.g. (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) for similar considerations). Such conceptual clarification and consistency would also produce more consistent and higher quality research and help order the literature better for future research. Finally, future practice research methods must meet requirements for accounting for situatedness (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016a). Since they are specific to the particular context, they cannot be predefined from a list, which make many quantitative methods problematic. However, in-depth case studies based only on interviews with attention to the individual actors are not adequate either. Managers often find it difficult to account retrospectively for how practices were actually performed and situated. Again, observation appears as the ideal instrument for capturing situatedness.

8. Conclusion

The practice-orientation within the B2B literature is growing, and there is a strong tendency among researchers to focus on what companies or managers do relative to their counterparts in B2B markets. Given the maturity level of the area, combined with the conceptual and methodological challenges of practice research we found it suitable to review B2B practice research. Our first contribution was to provide an overview of the content of B2B practice research. Second, comparing to a theory based practice understanding, we found that few studies actually illuminate all three key elements of practice. Extending from this we contributed by discussing how and why alignment is not achieved and lay out some key consequences. Third, since method turned out to be the most frequent barrier for actually studying B2B practices, we made a final contribution by pinpointing the greater diversity of methods that future research into B2B practices need to adopt.

In addition to the methods based evaluation and discussion of existing B2B research (Section 7), we also propose a few B2B topic areas containing valuable future practice research opportunities. Table 2 provides a good starting point for evaluating B2B topics suitable for adopting a practice based lens. However, our analysis and discussion showed that some topic categories from Table 2 are more prone to a practice lens than others. In fact, our analysis showed that some topics are difficult to pair up with a practice based lens. First, the most obvious candidate is to suggest increased future research into what B2B sales/marketers and purchaser actually do when they engage with customers and suppliers respectively. Armed with the suggested expanded tool box (see Section 7), researchers should be able to provide new insights specifically into e.g. Key Account Management and Bonding practices (sales/marketing category) or Relational and Supplier Oriented purchasing practices. Second, we see key opportunities within those categories dealing with collaborative involvement with suppliers (Supplier Development and Sustainable Sourcing). Collaborative involvement has often been documented as more effective than other approaches to developing suppliers, but further insights into the actual activities and routinized behaviors associated with involvement are still needed in the literature. Third, we suggest joint innovation as a suitable candidate for future research (see Table 2 (under co-creation practices) and subsection 4.8). Joint innovation (or co-innovation) is a central and highly valuable element of companies' relationships to key customers or suppliers. B2B research could benefit from an improved understanding of the specific actions and activities of B2B managers that go together to innovate, and the practice lens would be ideal to adopt in this setting. Finally, as a topic *not* appearing in Table 2, we suggest that a practice lens could be suitable for future research into conflict resolution. Conflict is inevitable in B2B exchange and can have dire consequences. The practice lens could strengthen academic knowledge of the habitual resolution behaviors and activities and their structuration properties.

We conclude that extant B2B research has embraced the practice term for the study of many B2B phenomena, but still in a way that often fails to capture the key elements of the practice concept. This may eventually cause confusion, faulty research, and lacking coherence. Also, it may prevent the full exploitation of the practice concept in B2B research. From a managerial perspective, executives and key decision makers need to know what B2B managers do relative to customers and suppliers, whether or not this action is something learned so they can do it again (habitus), and how formal and informal structures shape and are being shaped by the managerial action. This paper has paved at least some of the way for an improved future use of the concept to strengthen theory and practice, by providing insights into the challenges associated with applying the practice concept to B2B phenomena.

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