

A Program of Action for Business-to-Business Doctoral Programs: A Reply to Grahame Dowling

Erwin Danneels
Gary L. Lilien

We will briefly reply to Professor Dowling's insightful commentary.

PhD programs clearly need more Business Marketing content. The best way to address this deficiency is for all of us to produce research that is sufficiently rigorous and relevant so it must be incorporated in PhD studies. That material should focus on the key characteristics—extended value chains, long-term relationships, heterogeneous customer groups, often with a few, powerful and knowledgeable buyers, multiple decision makers with associated agency problems—that make business markets different.

We agree that rigor and relevance need not be at odds. The researcher (including the doctoral student) in search of relevance should not have difficulty identifying topics for study. Good business marketing research should be grounded in practice. Little's approach to problem-finding is to be commended, but is exceedingly rare in academia. We need more good listeners: dissertation advisors and PhD students who can listen to practitioners and hear what they mean (not necessarily what they say) about the (researchable) issues that challenge their practice.

Dowling points out that real business marketing problems are often

Erwin Danneels is a PhD Candidate, Department of Marketing, and Gary L. Lilien is Distinguished Research Professor of Management Science, Penn State, Institute for the Study of Business Markets, 402 BAB, University Park, PA 16802 (E-Mail: edd111@psu.edu and g51@psu.edu).

fuzzy and require an interdisciplinary and multimethod attack. And that is problematic even for seasoned researchers, not to mention new scholars. Beyond the intellectual challenges, new scholars face time and cost constraints, especially if they conduct the longitudinal research Professor Dowling calls for. Rarely can a PhD student both conceptualize and execute longitudinal research and finish a PhD program in a reasonable time. We need partnerships between businesses and academics to identify those topics worth tracking. Penn State's ISBM was developed to provide the infrastructure and resources to execute such studies, and awaits the emergence of rigorous and relevant research proposals.

Finally, Dowling underlines our concern about the misalignment between the academic reward system and problem oriented research. New measurements and reward systems are needed. Our promotion and tenure systems currently reward research rigor much more than research relevance. Until "impact" (on practice, on other disciplines, on students, on organizational performance) becomes a recognized and measurable part of the promotion and tenure process in academia, business marketing research will continue to miss the mark and fall far short of its potential. We hope that our readers have the energy and discipline to help align the reward and measurement system to do what is best rather than what is easy to execute and measure.