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Pictures of Academic Marketing, Science and University

This discussion paper is part of a research project that deals with Finnish academic marketing, i.e. marketing as a field of science and as a discipline. The emphasis is on experiences as constructed by 31 academic marketers, mainly professors, who told me stories of their work-life within academia. The approach is thus narrative.

These narratives are elaborated thematically in order to reflect special disciplinary features of marketing, emphasis being on the level of everyday culture as constructed in the stories told. These disciplinary features include commitment to the discipline vs. commitment to the work community; teaching as part of academic work; constructions of marketing as a science and the relationship between marketing practice and marketing science.

The thematical analysis shows that the priority of commitment is mainly placed on discipline, not working community or workplace. The objective of one's work is thus constructed as being the marketing science or oneself, but rarely advancing the well-being of the institution as a workplace. In other words – a common goal worth working for does not exist on the level of institution. However, there are a couple of clear exceptions to this, one certain university and gender making the difference.

Teaching is very seldom mentioned as being something worth working for and/or developing. It is more seen as "a necessary evil". Here, the line seems again to be drawn at gender – women tell enthusiastic stories of their successful courses and even mention that their duty is to help students grow, where there are many male respondents who don't even mention teaching when discussing their work.

Marketing as a science is constructed quite controversially. For example, where one respondent complains that not enough basic research is done, the other says that there is no such thing as a basic research of marketing. Also, where some construct marketing as a hard science (typical expressions being measuring, results and scientific), some seem to put emphasis on more interpretive and hermeneutic approaches, using expressions like understanding and evaluating.

The relationship between marketing science and marketing practice is the sensitive point of this field of science. Not surprisingly, the more one works with business life and the less one places effort on academic career, the less one claims to value academic merits. However, that does not function vice versa. Professors with little practical experience but a lot of academic merits do not discuss the issue or it seems totally unproblematic, but the less academic capital one has, the more missing practical experience seems to trouble. A balance between these two is indeed difficult to find. Only a few respondents have developed a functional way of using their academic skills – not being academic consultants – but rather being able to read and translate the language games between science and practice. However, these issues often raise a lot of emotions.