

# **Home-Run Theoretical Research**

**AMA-Sheth Doctoral Consortium 2014**



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## **Will focus on two issues:**

1. How to ask research questions which (hopefully) lead to impactful *individual* projects
2. Developing an impactful research *stream*

# 1. Asking Research Questions

- Karl Weick: “A good theory explains, predicts, and delights”
- Inherent in the notion of *delight*:
  - a) A certain target audience
  - b) Some element of surprise (without being preposterous)
  - c) “Not studied before” is usually insufficient

## How can you ask questions that have the potential to delight (editors, reviewers, your dissertation committee...)?

- Seek to resolve *conflicting* prior findings

Example: Research with Kenneth Wathne on monitoring: Does a manufacturer's efforts to monitor channel members either:

a) *Suppress* partner opportunism (transaction cost/agency perspective),  
or

b) *Promote* opportunism (due to psychological reactance)?

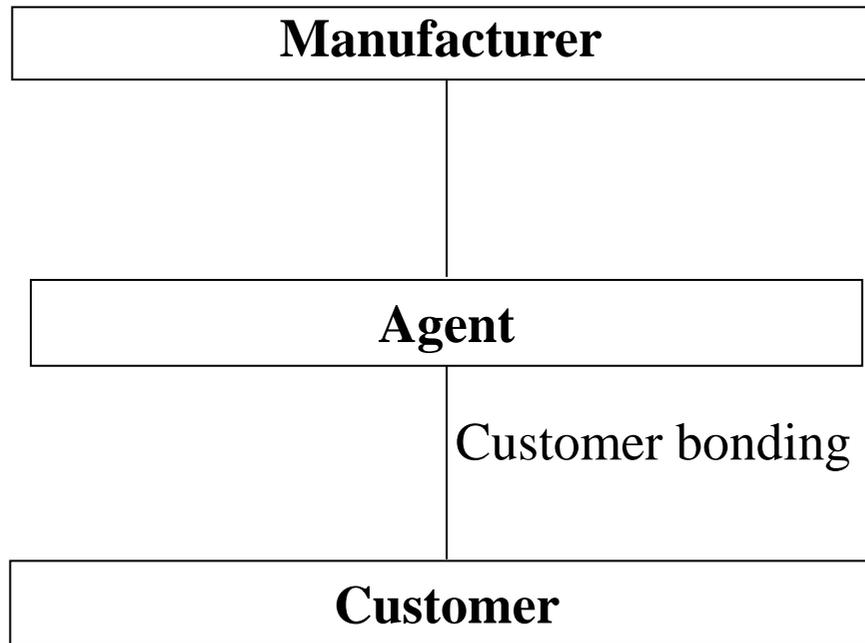
- *Bridge* research streams and tie things together

Some caveats, however

- Explain *counter-intuitive* behaviors and practices

Example: Research with George John on manufacturers' agents:

Starting point: Observation that agents spend a lot of time bonding with customers – above and beyond marketing needs



Why the customer schmoozing?

- Agents make specific investments upstream vis-à-vis the manufacturer
- Investments = exposure to manufacturer opportunism
- Conventional agent safeguards (as per TCE) are not available
- Downstream customer bonding = agent safeguard

## **In practice, many ways to go about identifying research questions:**

- Read the academic journals and read widely

Caution: The “future research” section

- Read the trade press and talk to manager

Impetus to agent study: Observation of a seemingly inefficient industry practice

Practice could be explained using transaction cost logic, but this required extending the basic TCE model in terms of its unit of analysis:

Organization of *one* (downstream) relationship impacts *another* (upstream) one

- Attend practitioner conferences

## 2. Developing a Research Stream

- My own bias: Useful to be associated with a particular area of research
- Over time, individual papers will build on each other and create overall impact
- Significant economies from knowing a) the substantive literature in an area, b) relevant methods, and c) research settings (e.g. institutional details about manufacturers' agents)
- Reputational advantages in the form of a) invitations to present and review, b) inquiries from smart young people, c) ease of writing tenure letters