

Conceptualizing Business in the New Economy

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Abstract

Theories of the firm have helped answer why firms exist. However, these theories do not address the conceptual core of what firms are in terms of ideas, concepts, and the relations they may hold. This paper focuses on frameworks and semantic networks as means to help conceptualize business. Various frameworks are examined through the similarities, complementarities, and differences of the concepts they feature with an emphasis on selection, variation and retention attributes: what makes one framework more attractive than others, how well it can be adapted to various cases and how easy it is to remember. This paper's main contribution is to synthesize the various conceptualization frameworks that have been proposed so far in strategic management and other fields of research. It opens with a summary of what frameworks and semantic networks are, followed by a comparative survey mainly anchored to strategic management literature. Insights available in knowledge management are also discussed. The frameworks are compared and synthesized to uncover the synergies currently available, leading to future research opportunities.

Keywords

business framework, business design, business model, e-Business, new economy

Introduction

Economic theories of the firm such as transaction cost (Coase 1937) as well as strategic theories of the firm such as the resource-based view of the firm (Hamel & Prahalad 1990), the knowledge-based view of the firm (Conner & Prahalad 1996) and the cultural evolution theory of the firm (Weeks & Galunic 2003) have helped answer why firms exist. However, these theories do not address the conceptual core of what firms are. This question has usually been the affair of strategists and organization specialists, in that understanding what firms are can be seen as a starting point for the journey to what firms become. In other words, strategists and organization specialists have had an incentive to represent and understand what a business endeavor is in terms of ideas, concepts, and the relations they may hold in order to carry out their work. In what follows, these holistic conceptual representations are called frameworks (Binwal & Lalhmachhuana, 2001).

Most business conceptualization frameworks can thus be found in strategic management literature, as well as in other streams of literature related to the new economy such as eBusiness. The integration of eBusiness into common business sense and practice is an area of knowledge characterized by strategic uncertainty, business model effervescence, and profound contextual change, making it a fertile ground for the formulation of some fundamental questions about the nature of business. This paper's main contribution is to

synthesize the various conceptualization frameworks that have been proposed so far, and to explore their similarities, complementarities, and differences. Their constituent ideas, concepts and relations are examined with an emphasis on their selection, variation and retention attributes: what makes one framework more attractive than others, how well it can be adapted to various cases and how easy it is to remember, from the holistic to the granular.

This paper opens with a summary of which type of framework qualifies for review here, followed by a presentation of the selected frameworks. A synthesis is presented along selection, variation and retention attributes (Weeks & Galunic 2003). We conclude with insights gained in conceptualizing business and opportunities for further research.

Frameworks: selection, variation and retention

Frameworks can take various forms, from bullet point lists like Slywotzky and Morrison's three dimensions (1998) to three dimensional semantic networks like Caisse & Montreuil's tetrahedral business design framework (2003). They can vary in scope in two ways: they can be industry-specific or generic, allowing the insights they hold to be appropriated by various industries and cultures with varying degrees of changes and adaptations. They can also feature a few key elements, or present a plethora of concepts, enabling conceptualization at strategic, tactical or operational levels, with varying degrees of granularity and complexity.

This paper makes three assumptions about frameworks. The first one concerns selection: absent or mislabeled points, nodes and links adversely affect business conceptualization. If this were not the case, all frameworks would stand as equally insightful, making moot the idea of selecting one framework over another. The frameworks presented here were selected based on the authors' appreciation of the meaningfulness of the points, nodes and links provided for conceptualization. Thus, it should be understood that this paper is not an exhaustive review of the field and that the frameworks presented here had to favor their own selection, reinforcing the assumption described in this paragraph.

Another point to be made about selection concerns the use of metaphor: this paper mainly deals with frameworks indigenous to business literature. There are two reasons for this. First, such frameworks are more universal. Frameworks imported through metaphor require insights about the subject from which one formulates the metaphor. For example, if one says that business is theater, one first has to conceptually represent what theater is through a framework, and then translate that framework for the purpose of business conceptualization (Pine & Gilmore 1999). Since any object is subject to metaphorical appropriation, this exercise can potentially take any form. The power of metaphor is also dependant on one's prior understanding of the object from which one seeks to import meaning. In other words, if one knows nothing about theater, the metaphor of business as theater is not very helpful. Consequently, different metaphors get selected by different people for different reasons, with various results depending on the attributes of the imported framework. Second, to leave out frameworks imported through metaphor does the reader no disservice; Morgan's *Images of the Organization* (1996) is wholly concerned with this topic and does a splendid job of presenting this subject.

The second assumption made here concerns variation and raises an issue which goes beyond industry or cultural specificities. It is assumed that businesses make use of two complementary logics in their conceptualization efforts: causation and effectuation. Causation centers on given goals, such as achieving certain market shares within certain industries. The challenges are finding the right goals and choosing the right means to achieve such goals. Effectuation centers on emergent goals, such as entering new markets and industries through fusion or alliances none had foreseen. Through one's knowledge and network of contacts, contingent action allows goals to emerge and evolve (Sarasvathy 2001) (for greater detail, see www.effectuation.org). Both logics are complementary, but most MBA strategic planning and marketing textbooks have focused on causation at the expense of effectuation. For example, Rayport and Jaworsky propose a business design framework (2000) based on four distinct infrastructures (technology, media, capital and policy) pointing to a central business strategy of six interrelated and sequential parts (market opportunity analysis, business models, customer interface, market communications and branding, implementation, and metrics). Such a sequential approach leaves little room for effectuation, making variation that much harder to achieve within the proposed framework. This point is important because causal and effectual reasoning are present in all business endeavors and both or either can be the focus of conceptualization through the use of a framework.

The third assumption concerns retention. Semantic networks are apt at conveying numerous insights with elegant simplicity and thus favor their faithful retention. They are also tricky to use and prone to conveying unintended meaning. For example, the absence of links between nodes may be interpreted as denoting the absence of relationships where the opposite is implicitly true (thus representing the opposite of what the author is saying in the accompanying text); a trail of arrows may lead to think in a certain direction, favoring conceptualization around a given logic, like causal over effectual thinking (thus making the framework limited to one way of thinking); nodes and links labeled too narrowly may favor certain types of stakeholders over others, like customers at the expense of other stakeholders (thus sacrificing framework breadth); and etcetera. With this caveat in mind, this paper assumes that semantic networks facilitate the retention of insights about business conceptualization in a way which eludes bullet point listings or tables. Considering that such networks have been used successfully in numerous other bodies of knowledge, from theology to artificial intelligence, there is nothing to contradict this assumption. The success and ubiquity of certain frameworks in strategic management, such as Porter's value chain (2001), strengthen this point.

From these assumptions, one can deduce that an ideal framework would favor its own selection, allow infinite variation and guaranty perfect retention. It would have enough elements to meaningfully conceptualize the business endeavor at various scopes of analysis without being so complex as to prevent researcher or practitioner appropriation. It would be flexible enough to be used in any industry, in endeavors of any size, in any culture or time-period. It would be a semantic network of such elegant simplicity that it would guaranty meaningful retention of the insights it holds. No such framework exists, but the ones which are examined here are increasingly edging in this direction.

Frameworks in the business literature

This survey begins in the late '70s with two frameworks: one by Miles and Snow (1978) and the other by Mintzberg (1979). Both contributions validated business strategy literature as a legitimate forum to discuss holistic business conceptualization. As shown in Figure 1, Miles and Snow's strategy, structure and process framework relies on a handful of broad concepts. It presents the firm as an arena for strategic response to three successive problems any business is likely to face, and deals primarily with the types of products a firm should be making in response to these. At its core, this framework is about evolving problems and the appropriate strategic response to be taken, which has repercussions on structure and process. What makes up structures and how processes work are left largely undefined.

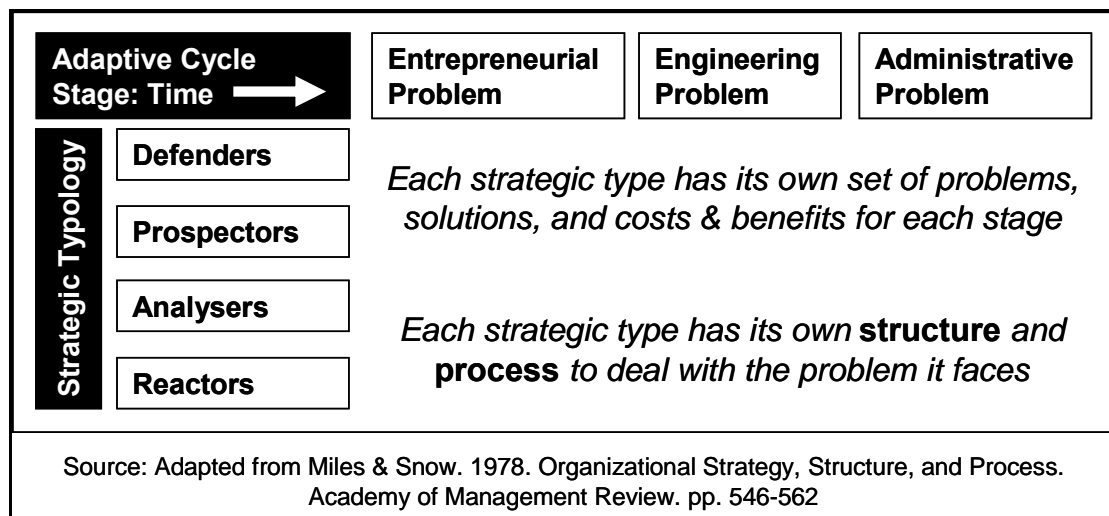


Figure 1. Miles and Snow's strategy, structure and process framework.

Mintzberg's five part framework (1979) is complementary to Miles & Snow's work (1978). As shown in Figure 2, it presents the organization as an arena for strategic action, with business strategy at the helm of various categories of human resources.

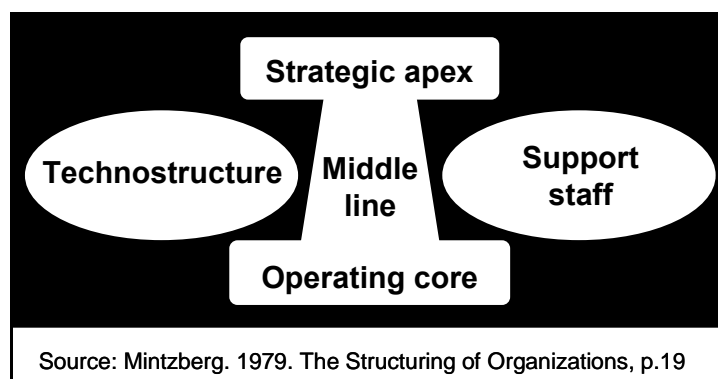


Figure 2. Mintzberg's five parts of the organization.

This framework does not provide any typology or temporal evolution for strategic action, nor does it tackle the conceptualization of process, but it does provide a generic structure to

complement Miles & Snow's work (1978). This left process as the main component still lacking a good conceptual framework, until Porter presented the value chain in 1985 and revisited it in the context of the new economy in 2001, as shown in figure 3:

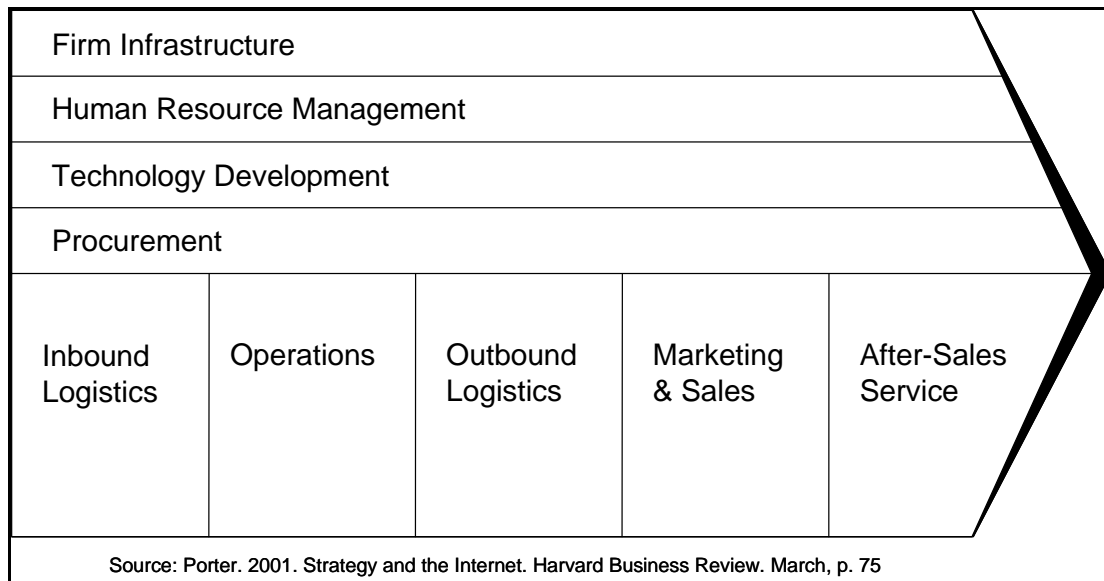


Figure 3. Porter's value chain

Just as Miles and Snow focused on strategy over structure and process, and Mintzberg focused on structure over strategy and process, Porter focused on process over structure and strategy. A synthesis emerged in 1998, in the form of Slywotzky and Morrison's business design framework, which was a list of concepts rather than a semantic network:

- Strategic Dimensions:
 - Customer Selection
 - Value Capture
 - Differentiation / Strategic Control
 - Scope
- Operating Dimensions:
 - Purchasing System
 - Manufacturing / Operating System
 - Capital Intensity
 - R&D / Product Development System
 - Go-to-Market Mechanism
- Organizational Dimensions:
 - Organizational Configuration
 - Hiring
 - Incentives

Strategic dimensions targeted the same concerns Miles and Snow were trying to address, but did so quite differently. Instead on focusing on products, Slywotzky and Morrison focused on customers and went far beyond four types of behavior. They introduced twenty-two profit models: elegantly simple semantic networks representing how a business relied on one or

more strategies to secure a rent from its activities. Operating dimensions targeted almost the same issues as the value chain, adding one crucial concept: capital intensity. Organizational dimensions received comparatively little attention from the authors.

While Slywotzky and Morrison must be given credit for bringing these three types of dimensions together, they must also be criticized for the lack of clarity with which interactions between these conceptual elements were presented. In essence, the elegant simplicity which they brought to their profit models was lacking in their holistic view of business conceptualization and how strategic, operating and organizational dimensions were interwoven into one another.

This crucial issue was addressed by Rayport and Jaworski and Hamel in 2000. Rayport and Jaworski's efforts to conceptualize e-businesses are presented first for the sake of narrative simplicity. As shown in Figure 4, this framework postulates four infrastructures which inform an e-commerce strategy, represented as a six-step process. The Business Models step is subdivided into four components. The resulting framework is essentially an enhanced version of Slywotzky and Morrison's synthesis: an e-commerce focused semantic network featuring many similar concepts, framed by four infrastructures.

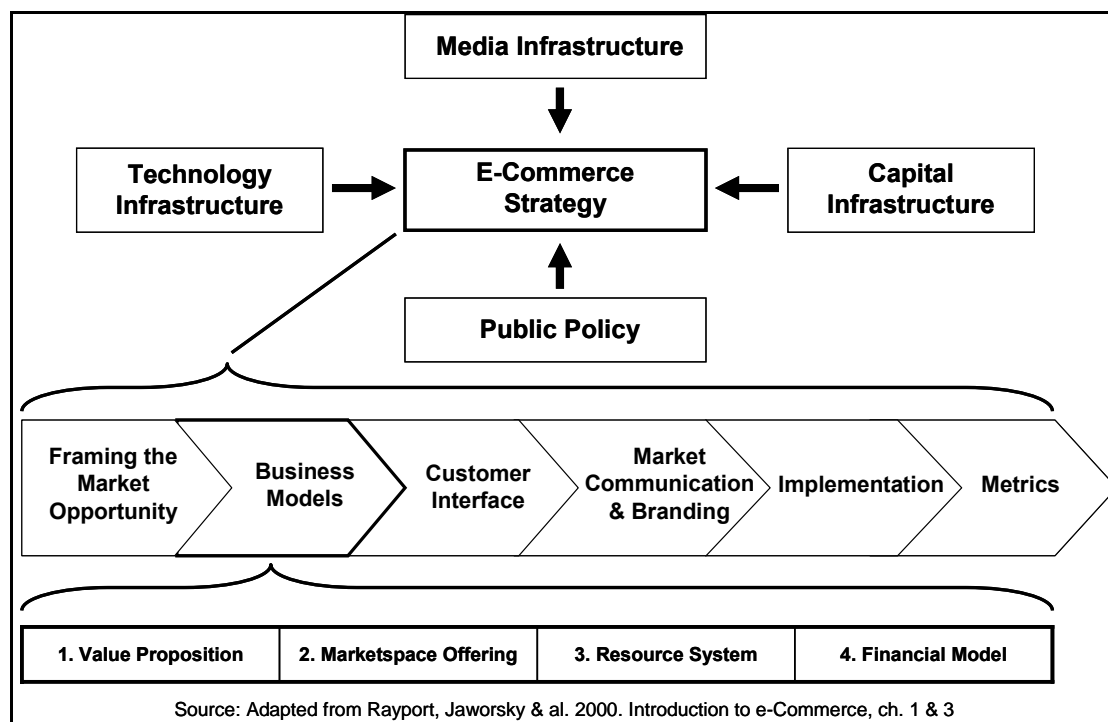


Figure 4. Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework

This framework is not intended to be universal and provides limited variation potential for other contexts and industries. It is also highly causal, presenting a flow of successive reflections about infrastructures, leading to strategy, itself divided into six successive steps for implementation. This leaves little room for effectuation or contingent action, at least insofar as it is not explicitly shown in the framework. For example, it provides no means to conceptualize how a business might try to influence the four infrastructures through lobbies or sustained action.

Hamel's business model framework was the first to go beyond Slywotzky and Morrison's synthesis regardless of industry or context, and to delve deeper into strategic, operational and organizational dimensions, as well as the relations they may hold. As shown in Figure 5, Hamel used four basic building blocks, broke them down into constituent elements, drew three bridge components and added four underpinning concepts.

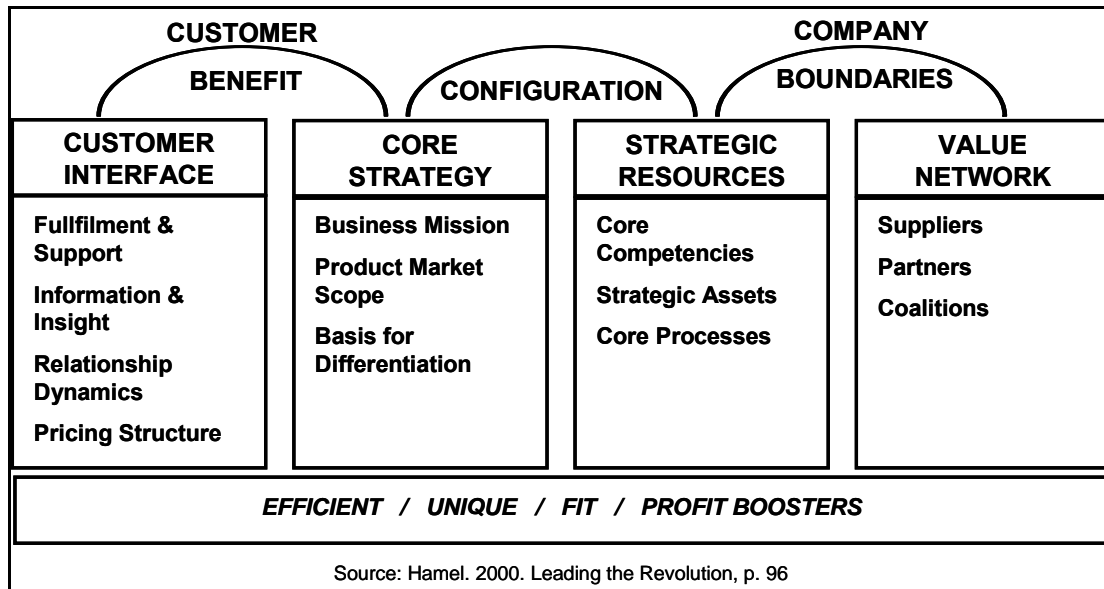


Figure 5. Hamel's business model framework

All of Slywotzky and Morrison's ideas are present; strategic dimensions can be found in the core strategy; operating dimensions can be found sprinkled throughout the framework, and; organizational configuration can be found in the bridge components linked to strategic resources. Even profit models find their way in through four underpinning components.

Contrary to Rayport and Jaworski, Hamel kept clear of recipe thinking, providing no vector of planning, no succession of elements to tackle in any particular order; this left the door open to causal and effectual logics. He also went well beyond Slywotzky and Morrison's three dimensions types and added other concepts useful to business conceptualization. For example, the Value Network block and the Company Boundaries bridge component incorporated insights about the network enterprise and other recent concepts in new economy strategy literature, such as Tapscott's business webs (2000). Another crucial addition was the core competence, Hamel's own contribution from 1990. As shown in Figure 6, the core competence does not go into great detail as far as business conceptualization is concerned, but it does go straight to the heart of the matter, providing a compelling alternative to the product-focus conceptualization of the enterprise previously featured in the literature.

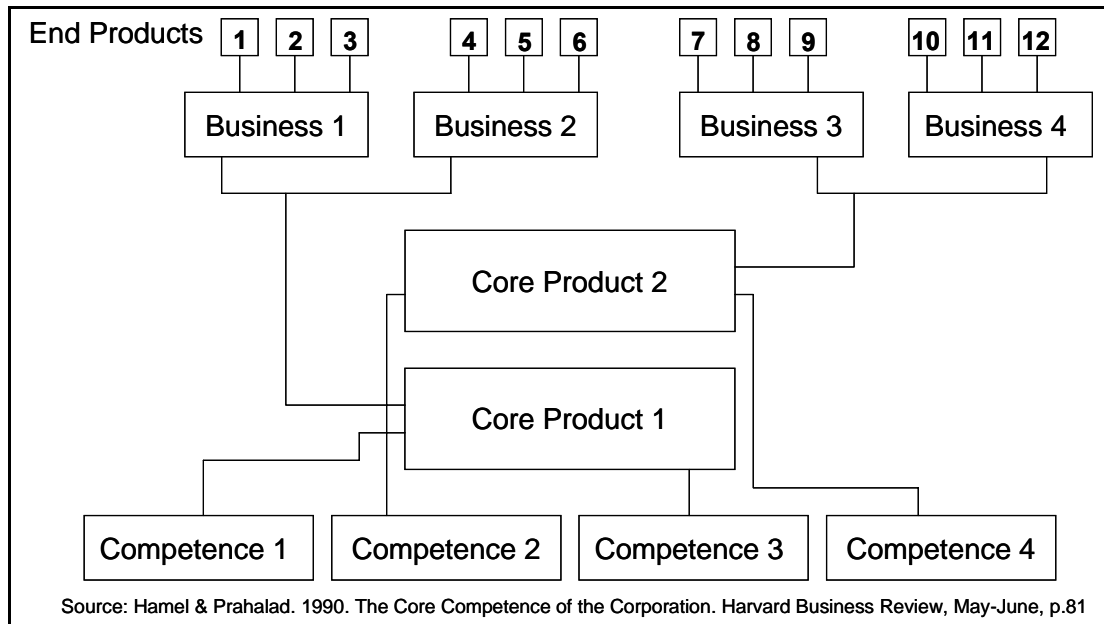


Figure 6. Hamel’s core competence concept

This semantic network seeks to represent the impact of core competences on how one conceptualizes a business, leaving much room for further conceptualization about what a core competence actually is. This was answered in 1994 by Collins and Porras through a yin-yang metaphor. As shown in figure 7, one half of the framework represents design aspects left open for change according to contextual imperatives, while the other half represents aspects which should be preserved.



Figure 7. Collins & Porras’ yin-yang metaphor

Culture, operating practices, goals and strategies are not core competences. Core values and core purpose are not either. Core competence is knowledge about these, about what to change and what to preserve, and about the balancing act they require. The idea that knowledge is at

the source of the core competence concept is implicit in Hamel and Prahalad's 1990 article. In 1996, Conner and Prahalad proposed a resource-based theory of the firm, where the key resource is knowledge. This theory presents knowledge-related costs of transacting as the key defining why any given business design leans toward the firm or the market in terms of organizational structure. Conner and Prahalad's contribution bridged strategic management literature with knowledge management (1996).

While no attempt to holistically conceptualize businesses has explicitly been made in knowledge management literature as of 2005, many past contributions seem to indicate that such an academic endeavor is not very far away. For example, knowledge capital valuation provides multiple examples of how to conceptualize knowledge within the firm. A further step was taken by Sveiby in 2001 with a framework describing how knowledge is transferred and converted between three poles: the individual, the internal structure, and the external structure. What is lacking is conceptualization about media, understood as the way knowledge is embedded, transferred and converted through stakeholders' use of technology. In other words, the material anchors of knowledge have yet to be conceptualized in a single framework, along with knowledge and its vectors of change.

The discussion now turns to two complementary contributions which have fed on strategic management and knowledge management. The first is a crane framework based on scenario thinking presented by Normann in 2001. As shown in Figure 8, the framework is developed along two axes: time on the horizontal one, scope of analysis on the vertical one. The conceptual past is closely related to the core competence and yin-yang frameworks (Figures 6 and 7), while the conceptual future deals with strategy and scenario thinking (Figure 1). The vertical axis, concerned with higher and lower systemic orders, could be populated with aggregate ideas like Porter's competitive threats and opportunities matrix (1980) and Rayport and Jaworski's four infrastructures at the apex (Figure 4), structure and aggregate process conceptualization like Mintzberg's five parts of the organization and Porter's value chain in the middle (Figures 2 and 3), and atomized processes and systems like Slywotzky and Morrison's operating dimensions at the bottom.

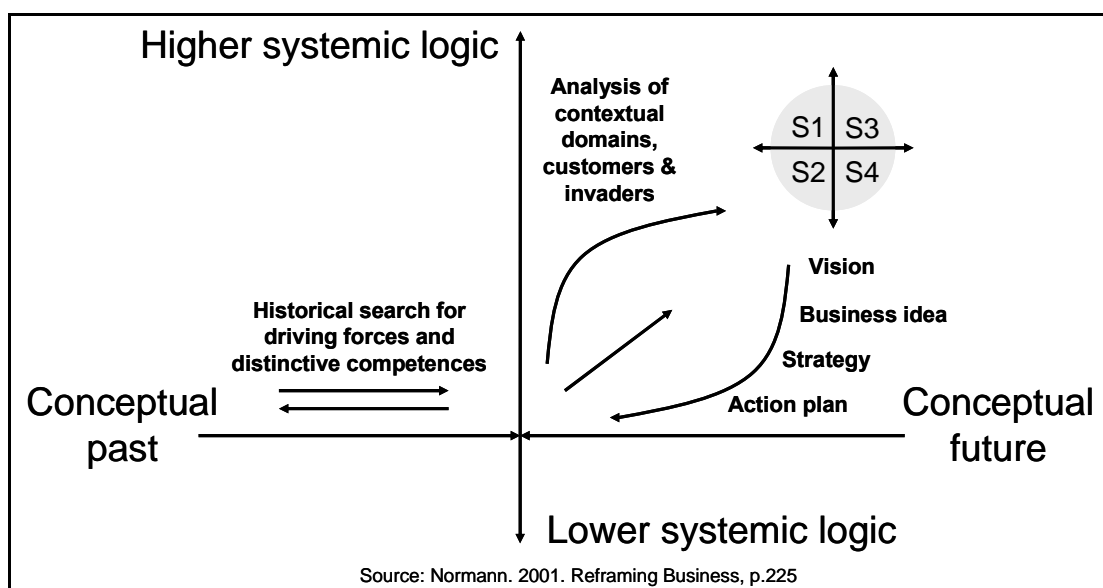


Figure 8. Normann's crane framework

While the crane framework can be populated with other frameworks and ideas, its own semantic network provides little to work with, unless conceptualization is only to occur at vast scopes of analysis like future scenarios and strategic planning. This problem is addressed by the last framework presented here: Caisse and Montreuil's business design tetrahedron (2003).

As shown in Figure 9, the tetrahedron approaches conceptualization as a cascade of interrelated concepts. It starts with four basic poles, pushes further with twelve unidirectional relationships between these four poles, and digs deeper by aggregating these concepts in six dyads and four faces. The geometry of these concepts yields a tetrahedron, hence the framework's name.

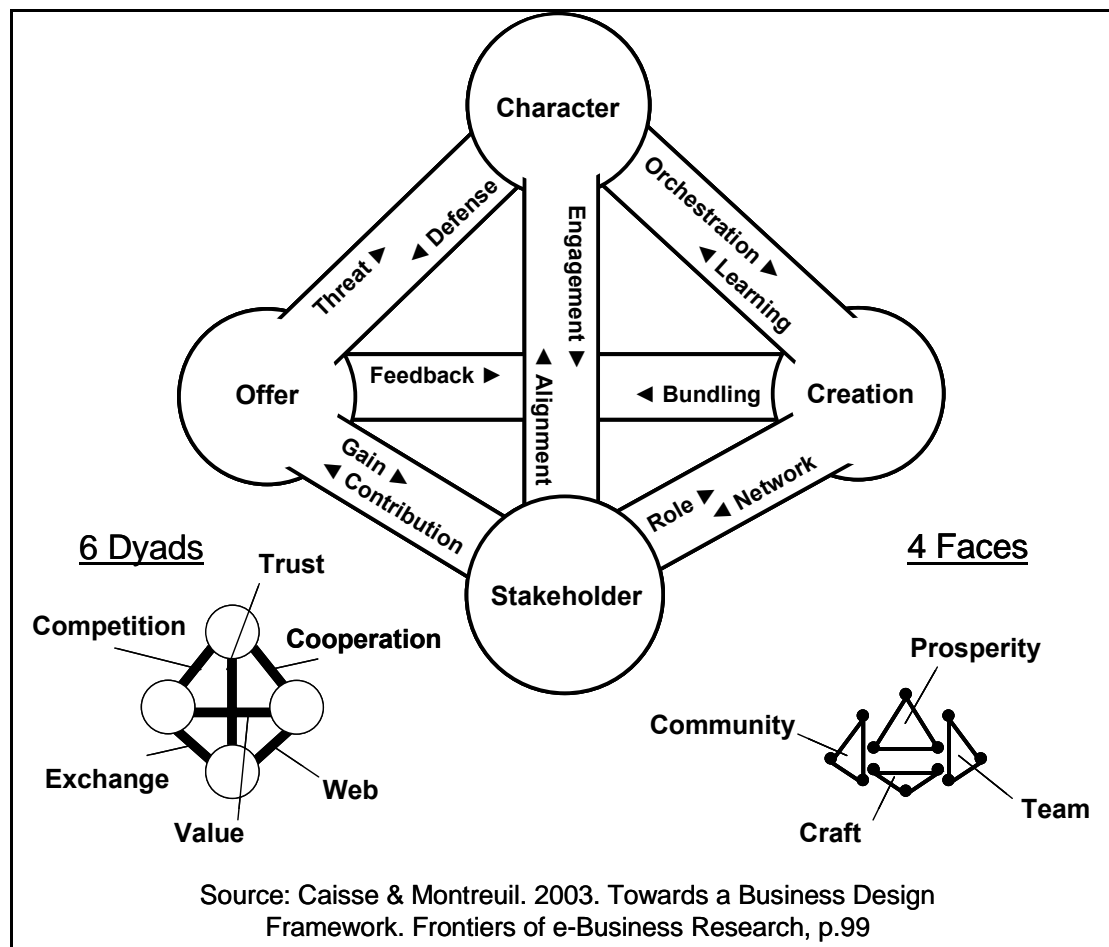


Figure 9. Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedral business design framework

The character pole, a business endeavor's equivalent of "know thyself", is essentially a continuation of Hamel and Prahalad's core competence and Collins and Porras' core values and purpose (Figures 6 and 7). The stakeholder pole is unique to the tetrahedron and includes, amongst others, the customer. Using the tetrahedron with a customer-centric mindset, affinities with Slywotzky and Morrison's business design framework, as well as Hamel's business model framework (Figure 5), become much clearer: the offer pole is the nexus of Slywotzky and Morrison's strategic dimensions and Hamel's core strategy and customer interfaces, and the creation pole is the nexus of Slywotzky and Morrison's operating

dimensions and Hamel's strategic resources and value network. The stakeholder pole, however, is much more holistic in its conceptualization breadth. In relation to the offer pole as a broader stakeholder interface, one can find Slywotsky and Morrison's organizational dimensions of hiring and incentive. In relation to the creation pole, one finds organizational configuration, as well as Hamel's company boundaries and value network. More importantly, the stakeholder pole explicitly bridges strategic management and stakeholder theory, with flows of gain, contribution, role and network (Näsi 2002).

The tetrahedron is more than a simple rehash of the literature's key concepts, and there lies its main interest. It links concepts in a novel way, starting out with four basic poles and gaining scope from this simple foundation. It does so by providing increased granularity, with concepts such as gain, roles, and feedback, while keeping a holistic outlook on conceptualization, with broader concepts such as community and prosperity. Normann's crane vertical axis can thus be found in this conceptual scalability. The temporal horizontal axis can be found in the character pole, where past core competencies and future selves are explored, in relation to evolving creation, offer and stakeholder contexts (Normann year?).

Synthesis

This synthesis examines the frameworks presented in section 3 through their selection, variation and retention attributes. First, selection: this paper is concerned with holistic business conceptualization at various scopes of analysis. Miles and Snow's strategy, structure and process (Figure 1), Mintzberg's five parts of the organization (Figure 2), Porter's value chain (Figure 3), Hamel and Prahalad's core competence (Figure 6) and Collins and Porras' yin yang framework (Figure 7) each approach conceptualization without industrial or cultural constraints, but focus on specific components of the business endeavor. They are not holistic frameworks. Slywotzky and Morrison's three business design dimensions, Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework (Figure 4), Hamel's business model framework (Figure 5), Normann's crane (Figure 8) and Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedron (Figure 9) feature the holistic approach which is sought.

Slywotzky and Morrison's three business design dimensions, Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework (Figure 4) and Hamel's business model framework are limited by the discourse from which they emanate: customer-centric strategic planning. Conceptualization mainly occurs around customers, leaving other stakeholders as an afterthought, in apparent confidence that they are either much better understood by whoever is concerned with the conceptualization exercise, or that these stakeholders are much less critical to the business endeavor. For example, how is the entrepreneur conceptualized in Slywotzky and Morrison's three business design dimensions? Business endeavors are, after all, entrepreneurial artifacts, just as books are artifacts of their authors. Can conceptualization truly be holistic without insights on this key stakeholder? Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework proposes four-component business models within an e-commerce strategy, all focused on customers. Entrepreneurs and employees are nowhere to be found, except perhaps as part of the business model's resource system. But what is their rationale for initiating and enacting the business? Investors and governments can be conceptualized in the capital and public policy infrastructures, but the endeavor is never aimed at them. It is not clear how one should conceptualize what they gain from participating in the business, contrary to customers who

have a value proposition within the business model, bridging the framed market opportunity and the customer interface. Hamel presents a customer interface with four sub components: fulfillment and support, information and insight, relationship dynamics, and a pricing structure. Why not use the same rigor and depth to understand stakeholders like owners, employees, suppliers, or investors?

In contrast, Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedron avoids any type of centrality. For example, exploring and understanding the rationale for customer gain and contribution is explicitly represented as no more and no less important than understanding gain and contribution for investors, employees, freelancers or core managers. This is a major difference. The tetrahedron allows, but does not require, conceptualization to be customer-centric. Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedron can accommodate any type of centrality, or no centrality at all.

Normann's crane is a different beast, naming customers explicitly, mentioning no other stakeholder, but still managing to steer clear of customer-centric thinking by making the concepts of its horizontal axis (core competence, scenarios, etcetera) available to whoever may be conceptualized along the vertical axis (groups, individuals, etcetera). The crane, however, lacks too many components to carry conceptualization beyond high strategizing. It lacks the holistic quality which is sought here, not because of cultural or industrial constraint, but rather because it provides no concepts to move from aggregate strategy to granular design trade-offs and opportunities.

Slywotzky and Morrison's three business design dimensions, Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework, Hamel's business model framework and Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedron also present very different selection attributes where conceptual linkages are concerned. Slywotzky and Morrison present no links between their dimensions. In other words, while interrelations between dimensions are implicit, no explicit concepts are provided. Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework links its concepts linearly. For example, there are no explicit links between the four infrastructures, but all point to an e-commerce strategy. This strategy is a chain of six successive elements with no explicit loops provided to represent any relationship between non-adjacent elements. Hamel's business model framework links its four main conceptual pillars with bridge components, but does so in a two dimensional representation, leaving some pillars unconnected to one another. For example, how are customer interfaces and value networks related as depicted in Figure 5? If this is not an oversight, than one finds himself forced to ask why some pillars are related and others are not, beyond the limits posed by the clarity required from a two dimensional semantic network. In contrast, Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedron provides links for all its poles and, contrary to Slywotzky and Morrison's three business design dimensions and Hamel's business model framework, gains scope not by listing more granular concepts as sub-elements, but rather by representing these concepts as links (flows) and interrelations (dyads and faces).

The variation attributes of Slywotzky and Morrison's three business design dimensions, Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework, Hamel's business model framework, Normann's crane and Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedron vary in two important ways. First, Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework follows a causal approach: its conceptual links are unidirectional, from an upstream market opportunity to downstream customers, with the selection of appropriate tools being the main conceptualization challenge to achieve

planned goals. Slywotzky and Morrison's framework provides no conceptual linkage at all, making the distinction between causation and effectuation moot. In contrast, Hamel's business model framework, Normann's crane and Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedron accommodate both causal and effectual logics.

Second, Slywotzky and Morrison's three business design dimensions, Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework, and Hamel's business model framework emphasize profit, while Normann's crane and Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedron remain mute on the subject. Normann makes no explicit room for it in his crane, while Caisse and Montreuil use a more encompassing concept: prosperity. This means that conceptualization about non-profit organizations or business endeavors which mix public and private elements involves some adaptation for the first three frameworks, while the other two can be more readily used.

The retention attributes of these five frameworks varies substantially. Slywotzky and Morrison propose a bullet list of twelve dimensions divided in three groups. Unless one memorizes every listed concept, there is no visual anchor, nor any relational logic between the three groups to help remember these twelve dimensions. Rayport and Jaworski's e-commerce framework presents fourteen elements also divided in three groups: infrastructures, strategic steps and business model components. Contrary to Slywotzky and Morrison, there is a visual anchor, and there are relational logics involved, but Figure 4 only exists in this paper. Indeed, Rayport and Jaworski propose distinct semantic networks for the four infrastructures and the strategic steps of Figure 4, but do not link these together with their business model elements in a single semantic network as has been done here.

Normann's crane is easy to remember because it showcases few concepts in a simple semantic network – it sacrifices scope for the sake of retention. Hamel's business model framework and Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedron could suffer from the opposite – sacrificing ease of retention for broader and deeper scope – but this is not necessarily the case. Hamel's semantic network starts with four elements which can be broken down into thirteen sub-elements, linked by three bridges and underpinned by four profit boosters. While the thirteen sub-elements and the four profit boosters may not be easier to remember than Slywotzky and Morrison's bullet list of twelve dimensions, the bridge components are a clear improvement, bringing relations between the four pillars to the conceptual forefront.

The tetrahedron's Russian dolls structure of poles and flows within dyads and faces seeks to gain the most out of the visual anchor provided by semantic networks, as well as to enhance relational logic retention. Just like Hamel's framework, the tetrahedron is made of four basic ideas from which everything else can be remembered and conceptualized. For example, all poles could feature a bullet list of typical constituent elements. This is not what Caisse and Montreuil have done. Instead, their framework presents twenty-two relationships, from what a single pole contributes to another pole (a flow), to the key idea linking two poles (a dyad), to the more aggregate concept linking three poles (a face). In the tetrahedron's case, retention is not about lists of sub-components, but rather about names given to relationships between the four poles.

Conclusion

No framework currently synthesizes all the conceptual insights which can be found in the various frameworks available. Normann's crane used in conjunction with Hamel's business model framework and Caisse and Montreuil's tetrahedral business design framework – two semantic networks which use contrasting vocabulary – would seem to yield the most complete solution as of 2005. This only emphasizes the constant evolution of the conceptual frameworks proposed in the literature and the opportunities available for future research. For example, knowledge management seems pregnant with a holistic business conceptualization framework; much like strategic management was in the late 90s. The idea is not that knowledge management holds a conceptual edge over other areas of research. The idea is that the breadth and depth of the concepts developed throughout the 90s make knowledge management a likely stepping stone to bind complementary insights and streams of literature into a single holistic framework.

The conceptualization of businesses in the new economy is a fundamental issue, yet remarkably few frameworks showcase strong selection, variation and retention attributes. Why? There can only be three possible answers. First, that business conceptualization is a waste of time. The pursuit of holistic knowledge about business cannot be accepted as a waste of time, considering the importance of businesses in the 21st century. This answer must therefore be discarded. The second answer is that frameworks are ineffective at helping one to conceptualize businesses. The presentation of numerous frameworks in this paper and the wealth of insights they provide discredits such an answer. The third answer is that creating holistic, meaningful, flexible and simple frameworks for business conceptualization is a difficult undertaking, and is still in its infancy as an academic endeavor. This is the challenge posed to researchers today.

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