

Research paper

Capability-driven industrial firms: Considering resources, capabilities, and competencies for marketing developments

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1. Introduction

Since Teece, Pisano, and Shuen's (1997) seminal article, scholars have investigated the properties and influence of organizational capabilities. While the mainstream strategy literature has made significant progress toward developing a coherent knowledge base establishing the capabilities-based view of the firm, the richness of our conceptual, theoretical, and empirical insights in the context of marketing, and especially industrial marketing, remains embryonic.

Throughout the last decade, a growing and consistent movement has emerged considering resource-based and capability-based reasoning in studying organizational phenomena. Since the 1990's, industrial marketing research has received notable contributions from the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) group's scholars. Given that relationships and networks have become focal concepts in industrial marketing, this theoretical platform has provided the basis for how various forms of capabilities factor in industrial buyer-seller relationships and networks. For instance, capabilities have been seen as an underlying foundation of boundary spanning activities in industrial marketing relationships (O'Cass & Ngo, 2012; Zhang, Wu, & Henke, 2015a). Also, a significant stream of research has focused on capabilities that build up various forms of customer value offering (Guenzi & Troilo, 2006; Kohtamäki, Partanen, Parida, & Wincent, 2013; Liozu & Hinterhuber, 2013; O'Cass & Weerawardena, 2010; Töytäri & Rajala, 2015; Zhang, Jiang, Shabbir, & Du, 2015). The question now remains in which direction and on what trajectory future capabilities-based

research takes place in the industrial marketing field.

Hirsch and Levin (1999) characterize four stages to theory development in organizational contexts. These stages they label: (i) emerging excitement; (ii) the validity challenge; (iii) tidying up with typologies; and, (iv) construct collapse. Arguably, capabilities research is currently facing “the validity challenge”. Hirsch and Levin (1999) contend that the challenge that confronts theory development therefore is the inherent tension between two forces: *Umbrella Advocates* who argue that broad (umbrella) perspectives are vital to maintain relevance with industrial marketing practice and the *Validity Police* whose interests are more methodologically oriented and who seek narrower perspectives that are consistent with rigorous standards of validity and reliability. Both of these literature streams are documented in this Special Issue.

Despite this growing interest in studying capabilities in the industrial marketing setting, there are still many research avenues that need addressing. Recent meta-analytical insights provided by Karna, Richter, and Riesenkauff (2015) suggest that there is considerable distinction between ordinary and dynamic capabilities, with each providing broadly comparable value to firms, although these capabilities impact firm performance under different environmental contingencies. This suggests a more fragmented and context-specific view when valorizing the contribution of firm's capabilities on strategy and performance.

Building on previous special issues in *IMM* that have tangentially addressed the capability-based view (e.g., Weerawardena & Mavondo, 2011), the theme of capabilities and their antecedent resources and

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associated competencies needs more investigation within the context of industrial marketing. Besides the need for the systematic refinement of existing knowledge, this special issue aims to apply recent theoretical advances originating from the mainstream strategy literature in industrial marketing setting to appeal to both the *Umbrella Advocates* and the *Validity Police*. Moreover, there is an urgent need for extension of our current knowledge regarding the capability-based view in industrial firms so as to move forward to the next stage of the theoretical life cycle (Hirsch & Levin, 1999). Insights are needed from examination of the interfaces between capabilities and other individual and organizational-level phenomena as well as industrial contingencies. Also, there is a need for more context-specific studies on capabilities in different sectors as well as different types of firms with distinctive resource configurations and competence profiles.

2. Major research streams of resources, capabilities, and competencies

During the last fifteen years, the capabilities-based view has been receiving growing attention from industrial marketing scholars (Wilden & Gudergan, 2015). The popularity of concept has been manifested through extending the capability-based view in subdomains that were of continuous interest to industrial marketing scholars since inception (e.g., supply chain management, branding, business relationships). The plausibility has been confirmed with rising numbers in publications and overall citations within and outside the *IMM* community. When analyzing the intellectual legacy of capabilities research, two major perspectives emerge: (i) the *macro perspective*, where the majority of scholars have focused, emphasizes the development, nurturing, and deployment of capabilities *internally*; and, (ii) the *micro perspective* of capabilities research in *IMM* which has been dominated by qualitative methodologists who have sought to examine the micro processes underlying how capabilities develop, evolve, and become redundant in organizations over time. Next, we examine the boundaries and specific composition of these perspectives which are illustrated in Fig. 1.

For the *macro perspective*, scholars have investigated how internal assets (resources and capabilities), both individually and combined, enhance business performance. Studies by Guenzi and Troilo (2006) and O'Cass and Ngo (2012) have revealed that marketing and innovation capabilities are instrumental in the value creation process.

Merrilees, Rundle-Thiele, and Lyle (2010) showcased why marketing capabilities are instrumental in achieving superior performance. Nath, Nachiappan, and Ramanathan (2010) focused on investigating the resources-capabilities-performance triad and identify that marketing capabilities are crucial for superior financial performance. The study by Yu, Ramanathan, and Nath (2014) found that marketing and operations capabilities work in concert in achieving superior financial performance. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to outline that within this stream of research has contextually extended to the exporting/internationalization topics where it was found that market-related capabilities are more directly involved in the enhancement competitive advantage in the international marketplace (e.g., Kaleka, 2002; Lisboa, Skarmeas, and Lages, 2011).

At the same time, a significant number of researchers have accentuated the importance of capabilities in relating to *external partners* in the process of joint value creation and mutually beneficial business results. The researchers in this stream mostly followed the theoretical premises established by the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) group, i.e., the network-based view of industrial marketing relationships.

The core intellectual legacy of this stream of research is that firms need to extend to supply chain partners and utilize their complementary resources/capabilities in order to achieve superior performance. Mitrega et al. (2012) focused their efforts of conceptualizing and empirical validation of networking capability concept in relation to business performance. Forkmann et al. (2016) proposed a supplier relationship management capability that is essential in managing the supply base. Kohtamäki et al. (2013) found that the deployment of networking capabilities is essential for industrial service providers in achieving sales growth. The study by Möller and Törrönen (2003) suggested that business customers draw upon supplier's value creation capabilities in order to secure appropriateness of involving specific supplier within their value creation projects. Wu et al. (2006) investigated the facilitation of IT resources on the development of supply chain capabilities that lead to superior performance. Sluyts et al. (2011) went one step further and argued that companies involved in alliances should put simultaneous efforts to develop alliance capabilities that would enhance performance. Most recently, Kohtamäki et al. (2013) offered a comprehensive literature review on alliance capabilities and proposed further research directions.

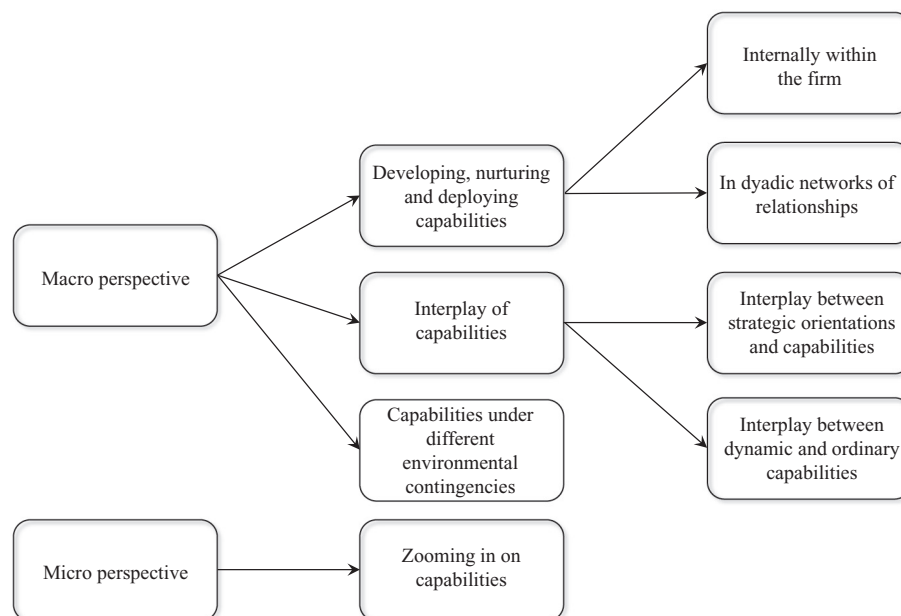


Fig. 1. Mapping the intellectual legacy of capabilities research in industrial marketing management.

Table 1
Overview of articles in the special issue.

Article #	Author(s)	Key focus	Research design	Context
Setting the stage: Capability-driven industrial firms				
1.	Kouropalatis, Giudici, and Acar	Business capabilities for industrial firms	Bibliometric analysis of 5112 publications	Community of scholars gathered around <i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>
Macro perspective: Aligning capabilities with the environment				
2.	Zhou, Mavondo, and Saunders	Marketing agility	Structural equation modelling with 518 companies	Chinese food-processing industry which is determined by changing market dynamics
3.	Getnet, O'Cass, Ahmadi, and Siahtiri	Bricolage capability	Structural equation modelling with 150 companies	Bottom of the pyramid manufacturing firms in Ethiopia who deal with down-stream retailers
4.	Aliasghar, Rose, and Chetty	Potential and realized absorptive capacity	Two-stage least squares model of 171 companies	Iranian automotive industry which has a strong motivation to acquire external knowledge
Macro perspective: Deploying capabilities within the firm				
5.	Wilden, Gudergan, and Lings	Dynamic capability deployment	Qualitative research with 12 case studies	B2B service firms that experience moderate to high turbulence in their environment
6.	Nagy, Jaakkola, and Koporcic	Dynamic and operational capabilities	Configurational analysis of 219 companies	Hungarian B2B firms from several different industries
7.	Takata	Selection of dual or indirect channels	Logistic regression and SEM of 429 companies	Japanese industrial goods manufacturers listed on major Japanese stock exchanges
Micro perspective: Toward the micro-foundations of capabilities				
8.	Tran, Zahra, and Hughes	Maturation of a new dynamic capability	Longitudinal single-case study	Two different brands of a European premium fashion company from Denmark
9.	Hughes, Souchon, Nemkova, Hodgkinson, Oliveira, Bosso, Hultman, Yeboah-Banin, and Sychangco	Export decision-making approaches	Structural equation modelling with 213 companies	Chinese manufacturing firms engaged in export marketing
10.	Van Poucke, Matthyssens, van Weele, and Van Bockhaven	Purchasing proactivity	Structural equation modelling with 112 sourcing projects	Purchasing department of a large financial institution in the Netherlands

The development and deployment of capabilities does not occur without accounting for the wider context in which firms operate. This was the main rationale of researchers who wanted to reveal what influence do *contingencies from external environment* hold onto the process of capability development and deployment. O'Cass and Weerawardena (2010) investigated how perceived competitive intensity influences the marketing capabilities and found that high competitive intensity is pushing firms to develop strong marketing-related capabilities. Wu and Chen (2011) showcased that capabilities depend on the highly developed social ties, especially in technologically turbulent environments. Tsai and Yang (2013) that the benefits of innovation capabilities are highest in environments with high competitive intensity and high market turbulence.

A further line of research has focused on the relationship between firm *strategic orientations* and *capabilities*. Mainstream strategy research has informed us on the central role of strategic orientations in enhancing capability-performance relationship (Slater, Olson, and Hult, 2006). For instance, studies by Calantone, Cavusgil, and Zhao (2002) and Celuch, Kasouf, and Peruvemba (2002) have found that learning and marketing orientations have significant impact on the firm's innovation and marketing capabilities. Studies by Theodosiou, Kehagias, and Katsikea (2012) have found that strategic orientations have positive influence on the development of marketing capabilities. Based on a sample of Russian industrial firms, Smirnova et al. (2010) found that market orientation enhances performance through deployment of relational capabilities. More recently, Mu et al. (2017) have found that networking capabilities enhance the influence of market and entrepreneurial orientations on the new product performance.

Last but not least, the significant part of IMM community was dedicated to investigating the interplay between *dynamic and ordinary capabilities*. A study by Neill, McKee, and Rose (2007) reported that dynamic sensemaking capabilities have influence on marketing strategy. Based on a qualitative inquiry, Salunke, Weerawardena and McColl-Kennedy (2011) proposed a path-dependent relationship between learning capabilities and ability to develop new services. Tzokas et al. (2015) have revealed that absorptive capacity has a mediating role in the relationship between technological capabilities and general business performance.

The *micro perspective* of capabilities research in IMM is largely grounded upon qualitative insights from scholars seeking to develop an in-depth view on how capabilities emerge, mature, evolve sublimately, and reconfigure in organizations over time. Guenzi and Troilo (2006) conduct qualitative research to reveal how integration efforts between marketing and sales function influences marketing capability building in firms. A multiple case study research by Beverland, Napoli, and Lindgreen (2007) provides a framework of key and supporting capabilities that build global brand leadership. O'Cass and Ngo (2012) investigate which capability have strongest influence on enhancement of value-based offerings. Their findings indicate that innovation and marketing capabilities provide the strongest contribution in this process. Storbacka (2011) identified the needed internal capability bundles firms require in solution-based business model development. Töytäri and Rajala (2015) offer more extensive theoretical assessment of capabilities that are underpinning foundation of value-based selling.

3. Classification of contributions from this special issue

The purpose of this Special Issue is to further explore how capabilities inform researchers and practitioners in the context of industrial marketing and to unveil antecedent resources and associated competencies. Contributions cover a wide range of perspectives on capabilities, both in terms of research topics and methodologies. In terms of topics, authors agree on the importance of capabilities in today's dynamic markets and offer several insight on the antecedents, consequences, and contingencies of many different capabilities. These include both the macro and micro perspective and several different

research contexts, as summarized in Table 1. In terms of methodologies, this Special Issue provides an insightful spotlight as to the state-of-the-art in research methods applied in Business-to-Business marketing. One article employs bibliometric analyses, two articles use qualitative approaches, seven use (predominantly) quantitative methodologies including structural equation modelling, two-stage least squares estimation, configurational analysis, and logistic regression, and the closing article is conceptual in character. Next, we shortly introduce each article of this special issue. The order in which the articles are published in this issue is based on the topic studied, as we have grouped articles around different research perspectives.

3.1. Setting the stage: capability-driven industrial firms

In the first article, 'Business capabilities for industrial firms: A bibliometric analysis of research diffusion and impact within and beyond *Industrial Marketing Management*,' Kouropalatis, Giudici, and Acar study how the community of scholars gathered around *Industrial Marketing Management* has engaged with business phenomena from the capability perspective introduced by Teece et al. (1997). Using the CitNetExplorer software, the authors analyze all capabilities-related publications in *Industrial Marketing Management* and their direct influence on other journals. Their findings describe the capabilities research lifecycle and unveil seven thematic clusters that highlight how industrial marketing scholars have expanded capability research by deepening the understanding of its relational foundations. This article supports the increasing relevance of capability research – as indicated, for example, by the fast-rising volume of publications and citations – but also cautions about the persistence fragmentation of the field, confirming remarks about the challenge of rigor and validity.

3.2. Macro perspective: aligning capabilities with the environment

Zhou, Mavondo, and Saunders, in the second article 'The relationship between marketing agility and financial performance under different levels of market turbulence,' explore the concept of marketing agility in the context of the Chinese food-processing industry. The authors position marketing agility as a dynamic capability and investigate both direct and indirect effects (through innovation capability which is an ordinary capability) on financial performance, and the moderating role of market turbulence. Using structural equation modelling on a sample of 518 companies, the authors find that the indirect effect of marketing agility on financial performance is stronger when market turbulence is low. Their findings specifically imply that the development and deployment of dynamic capabilities has greatest impact in low to moderate market turbulence thereby leveraging ordinary capabilities to provide maximum effect. However, this also implies that in high turbulence settings dynamic capabilities remain important because under these conditions ordinary capabilities become less impactful as firms seek to accommodate frequent environmental shocks.

The third article, 'Supporting product innovativeness and customer value at the *bottom of the pyramid* through context-specific capabilities and social ties,' written by Getnet, O'Cass, Ahmadi, and Siahtiri, investigates the concept of bricolage capability for local firms operating in bottom of the pyramid markets. Using a multi-source sample of 150 manufacturing firms in Ethiopia who deal with down-stream retailers, the authors find that the relationship between bricolage and product innovativeness is more complex than previously understood. Their findings imply that bottom of the pyramid managers should focus on establishing and leveraging their social networking capabilities in order to exploit their resource base for product innovation. Specifically, they indicate that employees who have strong networks/ties with civil society provide most value in realizing product innovation. They also caution against creating dependence on ties with government offices which they suggest creates greater risks to operating processes.

Aliasghar, Rose, and Chetty explore in the fourth article, 'Building

absorptive capacity through firm openness in the context of a less open country,' the roles that potential and realized absorptive capacity play in enhancing firm performance as well as external search breadth and search depth as antecedents of absorptive capacity. Using a sample of 171 suppliers operating in the Iranian automotive industry and a two-stage least squares approach, the authors find that only the firm's capability to acquire and assimilate new ideas from the external environment (potential absorptive capacity) is related to performance for these firms. Their findings demonstrate that that external knowledge search provides the greatest performance benefits for firms. They contend that due to international isolation, firms operating from a less open country experience resource asymmetries and cannot rely solely on their internal resources. Instead, they need to exploit collaborative opportunities so realise their competitiveness.

3.3. Macro perspective: deploying capabilities within the firm

The fifth article, 'The interplay and growth implications of dynamic capabilities and market orientation,' written by Wilden, Gudergan, and Lings, explores the interplay of a firm's dynamic capability deployment and its market orientation, and their joint growth implications. The authors develop a framework grounded in existing research and based on case studies with twelve B2B service firms that experience moderate to high turbulence in their environment. They outline that frequency, timeliness, and speed are the three relevant temporal qualities that characterize dynamic capability deployment, and that they affect firm growth conditional on the firm's market-driving vs. market-driven orientation. Their findings illustrate that dynamic capabilities have an iterative function by means of endowing firms with the capacity to respond to or affect change in their environment, thereby shaping opportunities to drive firm growth. To this end, the authors claim that simply possessing dynamic capabilities is a necessary but not sufficient condition for growth. Rather it is the rate of deployment of dynamic capabilities that most matters. The authors explain how sensing, seizing, and reconfiguring activities of firms arise through entering new markets, changing business structures and strategies, mergers and acquisitions, and providing new products and services.

In the sixth article, 'Complementarity versus substitutability of dynamic and operational capabilities in B2B firms: A configurational approach,' Nagy, Jaakkola, and Koporcic confront the complementary and substitutive roles of dynamic and operational capabilities. Drawing on a sample of 219 Hungarian B2B firms from several different industries and employing configurational analysis, the authors find that dynamic and operational capabilities are complementary rather than substitutive. The two types of capabilities also explain business performance better when combined than in independently. Their findings indicate that several forms of capability configuration can be identified each associated with high business performance. The authors provide a detailed account of the nexus between dynamic and operational capabilities and how they interact. For example, they indicate that customer-linking capability and product development capability are distinct approaches but are invariably difficult to reconcile. Aligning their complementarity, the authors reveal that managers should focus on organizational processes built around strong customer-linking capability by internally signalling the value of not only identifying attractive customers but initiating and maintaining relationships with them. In turn, this capability is realized through customer heuristics whereby they assess a firm based on how well it can deliver value propositions through a series of interactions that reflect product development capability.

Takata investigates in the seventh article, 'Transaction costs and capability factors in dual or indirect distribution channel selection: An empirical analysis of Japanese manufacturers,' the selection of dual or indirect channels. Considering both transaction costs and capability factors, the author analyzes survey data from 429 Japanese industrial goods manufacturers and finds that two capability factors—market

orientation capabilities and differences in channel members' capabilities—exhibit significant positive relationships with the selection of dual channels. Takata asserts three important findings can be derived from the research. First, asset specificity and behavioral uncertainty evidently do not exhibit the relationships predicted by transaction cost theory. Moreover, asset specificity is specified as negatively related to the use of dual channels. Second, market orientation capabilities and differences in channel members' capabilities exhibit significant positive relationships with the selection of dual channels. Third, capabilities are more important than transaction cost factors in explaining dual or indirect channels. Significantly, these results imply that when managers in Japan select dual or indirect channels, they should calibrate these two capability factors rather than two transaction cost factors. Thus, they should orchestrate positive valence from both their market orientation capabilities and channel members' capabilities, rather than avoiding negative effects due to asset specificity and behavioral uncertainty.

3.4. Micro perspective: zooming in on capabilities

Tran, Zahra, and Hughes, in the eighth article entitled, 'A process model of the maturation of a new dynamic capability,' explore how a new dynamic capability matures over time through the integration of operational capabilities. Using a process approach, the authors reveal the role of socio (group interactions) and cognitive (perceptions and interpretations) elements via an interactive learning process. A longitudinal single-case study of two different brands of a European premium fashion company from Denmark shows that this process is multi-stage, unfolding across different organizational levels that punctuate a series of conflicts that act as triggers for capability maturation. Their findings uncover several phases of capability evolution and maturation. They underscore capability evolution as a function of organizational learning and contend that there positive and negative spillovers from conflicts arising from capability maturation. Potentially, they argue, these conflicts can trigger new capabilities, but they need to be resolved in order to deliver the process of institutionalization that enables continuous organizational learning and subsequent value creation.

The ninth article, 'Quadratic effects of dynamic decision-making capability on innovation orientation and performance: evidence from Chinese exporters,' written by Hughes, Souchon, Nemkova, Hodgkinson, Oliveira, Boso, Hultman, Yeboah-Banin, and Sychangco, explores three different export decision-making approaches. Using a sample of 213 Chinese manufacturing firms engaged in export marketing, the authors report complex relationships between planning, creativity, spontaneity, and innovation orientation. While an increasing level of export planning reduces an exporter's capacity to innovate, creativity has a positive direct effect on exporter's innovation orientation, which also benefits from extreme spontaneity. Their findings indicate that managers of exporting firms should focus on enhancing their levels of innovation orientation, a conclusion that they limit to their sample of Chinese exporters. They premise their argument on the notion that, sustaining growth and developing a sustainable competitive advantage in the international arena necessitates less dependence on imitation strategies and a greater focus on innovative organizational processes. Fundamentally, they show that combining different decision making approaches enables higher levels of innovation orientation to be realized which, in turn, improve firms' potential to outperform competitors in the international marketplace. More specifically, this implies that managers need to moderately plan their activities but under changing environmental conditions planning per is secondary to timely and creative decisions as opposed to planned, reasoned and rational decisions.

Van Poucke, Matthyssens, Van Weele, and Van Bockhaven explore in the tenth article, 'The effects of purchasing proactivity on value creation and supply risk reduction in sourcing projects: Implications for marketers' capabilities,' the role of purchasing proactivity. Using data

from 112 sourcing projects of a large, private financial services company in the Netherlands, the authors find that purchasing proactivity enhances value creation and supply risk reduction sourcing outcomes, and that purchasing proactivity is driven by early involvement of and responsibility granted to the purchasing professional. Their findings illustrate that proactive purchasing behaviours directed toward partners enhances value creation and supply risk reduction sourcing outcomes. Importantly, they characterize purchasing proactivity as an individual-level capability exhibited by purchasing professionals. This has implications for the capabilities for industrial marketers in regard to changing customers' attitudes which are elucidated in the article.

4. Future research

This special issue has encompassed the state-of-the-art in capabilities-based research of industrial firms. The future offers a series of rich research opportunities that will build on this extant knowledge and we outline a series of suggestions that warrant urgent investigation. First, digital transformation capabilities have developed significantly of late. The origins of this literature in this journal can be found fifteen years ago but the velocity of new insights and practice means that digital transformation underpins many of the strategic, tactical and operational challenges for business. Building the appropriate repertoire of resources, capabilities and competencies to support this is thus timely. Second, marketing asset orchestration remains a sub-field of this domain that understands well how firms seek to mitigate opportunism and recontracting hazards through forms of cooperative adaptation. This requires departments or business units within the firm to integrate based on their cospecialization. However, the form and structure of these new capability combinations means that important and nuanced understanding of capability integration needs to be improved whilst also developing a greater recognition of capability substitution effects which displace the benefits of cospecialization within the firm. Third, marketing capabilities are operational in nature and can become

dynamic. In order to understand this process, we need to uncover the form and condition that determine how the marketing capabilities lifecycle from origin to obsolescence and reconfiguration applies in business-to-business context. Therefore, answers to the which, where, how, and when questions of marketing capability alignment with market, operating, and technological conditions requires greater scrutiny. In this sense, we gain improved understanding of how agility and capabilities leads to transient competitive advantage.

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We want to thank all contributors to this special issue. We received a large number of competitive submissions, of which finally eight submission are published herein together with two invited articles that were reviewed by the special issue co-editors. We want to note that when there was any potential conflict of interest between the authors of articles due to for example co-authorship, a co-editor of the special issue without any conflicts of interest handled the article. We are grateful to the reviewers (see Appendix A) that assisted us to curate this special issue. Their authoritative adjudication of the manuscripts across several rounds of review provided extensive and valuable suggestions. Finally, we thank the Co-Editor of this journal, Adam Lindgreen, for providing us the opportunity to compile this issue and for his continuous support throughout the review process. Last, but not least, we warmly thank all of the authors who submitted their manuscripts (not previously published elsewhere) for consideration of inclusion in *Industrial Marketing Management*. We appreciate and are grateful for the authors' desire of wanting to share their knowledge and experience with the Journal's readers—and for having their views put forward to be challenged by the reviewers and their peers. We are confident that the articles in this special issue contribute to our understanding of capability-driven industrial firms and anticipate that you will concur when you read this issue.

Appendix A. Appendix: List of reviewers of the special issue

Reviewers and affiliations

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 Christian Schmitz, Ruhr University Bochum
 Costas Leonidou, Leeds University
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