Shifting from bad practices to good practices in research: Review of *Bad to Good—Achieving High Quality and Impact in Your Research* edited by Arch G. Woodside (Emerald, 2016)

By

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Short bio

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***Achieving High Quality and Impact in Your Research* edited by Arch G. Woodside**

(Emerald, 2016)

Arch Woodside's new book *Bad to Good—Achieving High Quality and Impact in Your Research* (first edition), published in 2016 by Emerald Group Publishing Limited, addresses an extremely important topic in business-to-business (B2B) marketing and in business/marketing research in general, namely providing useful insights on how to perform highly competent research and maximize the impact of the research output. The book identifies bad practices that appear within most articles among the ranked journals in the sub-disciplines of business/marketing and provides useful remedies for such bad practices. This and other points are elaborated below.

The book comprises seven chapters, contributed by a total of nine scholars. As well as editing the book, Arch Woodside contributes to all of the articles, either as sole or co-author. The first chapter, an original article contributed by Arch Woodside, provides a description of 22 bad practices prevalent in business/marketing studies, and suggestions on how these can be avoided by embracing good practices. This appears to be the central chapter of the book, and sets the tone/direction for the remainder. The next six chapters, which use material from recently published papers, focus on methodological topics. In particular, the book proposes a number of methodological approaches, namely contrarian case study and configural analysis (Chapter 2), fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (FSQCA) (Chapter 3), case study research (Chapter 4), algorithm and statistical modeling methods in field experiments (Chapter 5), configural analysis in service contexts (Chapter 6), and configural asymmetric theory in the context of hospitality (Chapter 7). Although the different chapters use examples from various

fields, the common theme among them is that they argue for use of the proposed methods over well-known methods such as surveys, hypothetico-deductive techniques, structural equation modeling (SEM), and multiple regression analysis. Challenging well-established methods requires bravery, and the book has this in abundance. Arch Woodside provides a detailed, applicable presentation of the methods, and, most importantly, sufficiently and confidently justifies why they are more suitable over other approaches. The use of numerical examples is particular helpful in this direction.

The central contention of the book is that the bad practices currently dominate research (compared to good practices). As Woodside notes, *"Many of these practices are well-known but they are still practiced widely"* (p. 49). Woodside believes that researchers do not use bad practices on purpose; such use is mainly due to a lack of training and the mental stance of asking what constitute good or bad practices. He also argues that bad practices in research are embedded in scholars' career training (e.g., through reading articles characterized by bad practices and by attending courses that focus on the use of regression analysis or SEM), and as such, are not easily avoided by researchers. This probably explains the underlying pessimistic tone of the book *("this book is likely to have little impact,"* preface, p. xi).

On the other hand, and on a more positive note, the book highlights that researchers should not lose hope; rather, they should continue working towards the elimination of bad practices and embrace the use of good research practices. The book is particularly useful in this respect, as it provides a number of remedies for researchers who want to produce high-quality research.

For the B2B scholar wishing to enhance the impact of his research output, is "bad to good" a good place to start? The answer is certainly yes. There has been an emerging discussion about the relevance of B2B marketing research (c.f. Hutt and Walker, 2015; Åge and Cederlund, 2014), as well as the marketing literature in general (Jaworski, 2011; Reibstein,

Day, and Wind, 2009). Many researchers have argued that academic research within the field of B2B marketing is becoming increasingly irrelevant to practice (e.g., Brennan and Ankers, 2004; Brennan and Turnbull, 2002; Sheth and Sharma, 2006). B2B research has been trying to explain complex networks and phenomena around business relationships (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013). Managers' realities are characterized by an immense complexity that the mainstream use of methods such as multiple regression analysis and SEM, which have dominated B2B research, has not been able to keep up with. The book provides insights to researchers in terms of conducting more useful research. Woodside suggests moving to more complex, abstract, and pragmatic types of research, such as configurational analysis, which will make it possible to grasp this complexity, and ultimately enhance the relevance for managers (Möller, 2010). An underlying message of the book is that researchers should challenge the prevailing paradigm of empirical studies in marketing, which is data-driven, and focus on embracing applied research that addresses specific managerial issues, even if no advanced methodologies are proposed (c.f. Brennan, Tzempelikos, and Wilson, 2014). In other words, marketing research should shift from problem finding to problem solving (Hughes et al., 2012).

Having said that, the book does not support (either explicitly or implicitly) the idea that business/marketing research should focus on managerial impact while neglecting its academic nature. That would be myopic. Advancing knowledge should remain a priority for academics (and the book suggests a number of innovative methods, such as FSQCA, that aim to advance our knowledge on conducting proper research). A central message underpinning the book is that scholars should aim to create useful research, not merely make theoretical or methodological advancements; marketing research can (and should) be relevant to practice as well (Holmlund, Kowalkowski, and Biggemann, 2016). Although the book does not elaborate on the issue of the managerial relevance of marketing research (that would probably be beyond

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the publication's scope), Woodside apparently has strong opinions on the topic, and provides useful insights on how to practically enhance the impact and relevance of research. B2B researchers can really benefit from this discussion.

At this point, allow me to select my personal highlight from the book. Woodside's Chapter 1 looks at 22 bad practices that are prevalent in the sub-disciplines of business/marketing, and discusses how to design good practices in theory, methodology, analysis, and interpretation of data to avoid these bad practices. Some of the topics discussed include the matching of theory to data, validation of findings, usable share of respondents, nonresponse bias, hypotheses testing, and replication of findings, to name a few. Woodside coherently explains the "bad practices" and outlines the "good" ones, along with the actions required to shift away from the former. Table 1 (pp. 4–5) effectively illustrates the transition from bad to good practices and how to achieve it. Woodside is to be congratulated for the scholarly value of this effort, as he really does provide a holistic and well-justified approach on how to move away from bad practices. However, he also manages to create an easy-to-follow, practical roadmap for researchers seeking to improve the quality of their research output, where, for whatever reason, they have been struggling to do so. Frankly, I am sure that I will read this chapter more than once before I start to write my next paper.

In the paragraphs below, a more detailed elaboration on the evaluation of the book, from a scholarly and pedagogy viewpoint; its viewpoints; and its positioning in the relevant literature, along with some (hopefully) constructive recommendations, are provided.

1.   A description and evaluation of the work, and its value in terms of pedagogy, thought, or scholarship

This is a very good book, in my view. After reading it, it became evident that Woodside is a highly experienced researcher and editor. His insights cover a wide range of research issues in

the area of business/marketing. I doubt that someone without his experience would be able to provide such a holistic view of research problems, or such convincing and precise remedies. In addition, Woodside is a brave thinker who manages to challenge established methods (such as hypotheses testing through multiple regression techniques) that have dominated the thinking of business/marketing studies the past few decades. Evidently, Woodside and the other authors have extensive backgrounds in the field of quantitative research methods. Overall, despite the sophisticated nature of many of the concepts covered, it is an accessible, readable, and practical book. As I read through the different chapters, I was thinking of the strong points of the book and the range of different issues that could and should be covered by this kind of text. The book's highlights include the following:

- Strong and comprehensive coverage of: (1) the research issues associated with business/marketing empirical studies, at both the theoretical and empirical levels, (2) how to design good practices to fix the problems and, ultimately, increase the impact of research.

- Detailed, relevant chapters that address concepts and practices concerning high-quality research.

- Original ideas and critical synthesis of the prior literature.

- Many relevant case studies with exercises/examples for further practice and discussion. A great addition to the chapters.

- Sufficient theoretical background and up-to-date references. The bibliography for each chapter reveals the authors' expertise on the topic.

- Effective discussion of FSQCA.

- Informative figures/tables and numerical examples that add to the logical flow of the book and facilitate understanding of the text.

- Good use of glossary of terms. Very good use of English throughout.

On the other hand, I feel that there are some issues that could have been improved. Specifically:

- Although the book is of managerial relevance, the authors could have developed areas on the practical issues/implications of embracing good practices in research. The book seems to overemphasize the theoretical foundations of research methodology and analysis of the data and rather ignores the practical, easy-to-implement recommendations for practitioners. I perfectly understand that it may not be easy to keep a balance between the theoretical advances and managerial relevance in a single book. However, I feel that if each chapter had been supported by additional managerial implications so as to offer a simple, comprehensible, yet scientifically reliable guide on how research output can be utilized by practitioners, it would have benefited the variety of the book and make it easier for a non-academic audience to follow the flow of the text.

- I would like to see some more emphasis on the "pedagogy" perspective of research throughout the text. For example, should we redirect PhD programs to become more practice-based (Danneels and Lilien, 1998)? The book calls for stronger theoretical underpinnings and more flexible, interpretive research approaches to tap into the richness of real-life business settings. To my understanding, a message underlying the book is that, regardless of the actual methodology chosen (quantitative, case study, configurational theory, etc.), as each has its own pros and cons, improving the impact of the research in the field of business/marketing cannot be achieved via quick-fix recipes (Guiette, Matthyssens, & Vandenbempt, 2014). Rather, a change in mindset is needed to move towards more applied action research (Gummesson, 2014). Given that Woodside points out that researchers are not to blame for current shortcomings, there is room for a more open, deeper discussion of what conditions should be met by other stakeholders in order to achieve high-quality and impactful research. A more explicit and comprehensive discussion on what institutes, supervisors, journal editors, and academic managers can (and should) do to train young researchers properly would be welcome. I feel that this discussion is only implicitly

covered in the book. I understand, of course, that this is a broad topic that may also touch upon educational issues (such as institutional changes, criteria for promotion, tenure and salary increases, etc.) (Calder and Tybout, 1999), which probably go beyond the scope of the book. However, considering the apparent wisdom and experience Woodside has, as both a researcher and an editor, I would really like to see more of his thoughts on this issue. Nevertheless, this is somewhat a matter of taste as the book is otherwise well written and comprehensive.

Overall, the book demonstrates expertise on the topic and a very good understanding of the principles and concepts underlying quantitative research methods, as well as the contemporary practical issues and their associated complexities. The book encourages a move toward complexity paradigms as the necessary step to generate more abstract and pragmatic theories and useful research (Yadav, 2010). What really struck me is that recent empirical findings from various fields have challenged the flaws within mainstream use of regression analysis and SEM. I feel that this research-based approach suggests a useful and fresh perspective on the area. Overall, Woodside provides great theoretical and practical value that will be of interest of both young and experienced academics.

2.   How the book is positioned against competing books

In my view, this book is way ahead of the competition. Traditionally, books focusing on quantitative research have been too theoretical, missing the practical or applied aspects of quantitative research. While possibly being a good choice of textbook for inexperienced researchers (e.g., undergraduate or postgraduate students), they lack the depth of analysis and the empirical support that a truly useful book on research methodology should have. In addition, academics with strong mathematical background have often focused on the methodological advances and numerical justification of the various methods. Their books,

while often of high academic value, are very difficult to read (especially for young researchers and PhD students), and fail to provide easy-to-understand and applicable solutions by which to improve research. On the other hand, some authors do not understand the importance of methodological advances as a way of improving the quality and impact of research. The research methods are treated merely as an applied phenomenon, while missing a theoretical background. Such works basically follow a "cookbook" approach, consisting mainly of how-to guidelines for researchers.

The present book goes beyond that level. Woodside brings together a range of original and contemporary ideas on how to address the identified research issues and blends this with practical examples of empirical data. The book manages to maintain a balance between the methodological and theoretical advances of quantitative research methods and their empirical applications. The book not only shows clear evidence of the development of fresh ideas in the area, but also provides useful insights for reflection on the suitability of the methods that have dominated business/marketing studies so far. I believe that this depth of analysis and scope of the study is lacking in competing books. All in all, I feel that Woodside's work is a step forward from alternative books in the area of quantitative research methodology.

3.   Target audience

The book is suitable for researchers of all ages and experience levels, including experienced researchers, early-career researchers, and certainly PhD students. I truly believe that this book should be used as a core textbook at all business/marketing PhD courses. In short, the book can significantly benefit all scholars who reflect on the quality and relevance of their work and seek to improve the impact of their research. I will certainly adopt it for my own research.

4.   Structure, coverage, and organization of the book

One of the key strengths of the book is that the authors have a clear idea about what bad and good practices in research are and how the former can be turned into the latter. Building on such a solid and clear background, the authors provide a critical evaluation and synthesis of existing literature and provide recommendations for researchers. The use of recent empirical findings is particularly useful in this direction, and this is a strong element of the book. In addition, the length of the book is appropriate, and will not tire readers.

If I were being picky, I would say that there is a lot more to write about how the different chapters of the book relate to its overall theme ("bad to good"). The chapters ostensibly provide original studies dealing with different topics, but the consistency between Chapter 1, which focuses on "moving away from bad practices" and the subsequent chapters needs to be more explicitly demonstrated. In that sense, a more detailed preface or an introduction to the book would probably be useful.

Another issue that might have benefited from further attention is longitudinal types of research that aim to further validate or expand on prior research. Perhaps a chapter focusing on replication study and/or meta-analysis strategies would be a good addition. However, the authors do a good job of covering important issues pertaining to quantitative research methods, and I understand that it is practically impossible to cover everything in a single book without extending it significantly. Perhaps these issues could be addressed in future editions. Overall, the authors manage to provide a comprehensive publication, which is more than other authors in the area have managed.

5.   Final remarks

I think that the title of the book, *Bad to Good—Achieving High Quality and Impact in Your Research*, is suitable and reflects the content. Overall, I think that we now have an academic book of high quality that contributes substantially to theory and practice, and features in-depth

presentation of research methods, as well as empirical examples. I feel that the book not only summarizes recent advances in the area of quantitative research methods, but also serves as a springboard for further discussions on how to move to more pragmatic types of methodology and create useful research, both from an academic and practitioner viewpoint. I think this book has set high standards in the area and has the potential to run into future editions. I congratulate the authors and wish them success with the publication.

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