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PhD Dissertation of

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Participatory & designerly ways of  
co-creating business model transformation

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Quasi-experimental Phenomenographic  
Action Research

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# Participatory & designerly ways of co-creating business model transformation

## Quasi-experimental Phenomenographic Action Research

This quasi-experimental longitudinal study illustrates an original methodology for investigating and designing business model transformation by combining action research with phenomenography; Action research to support business model transformation for improving the situation of the involved, and Phenomenography, because the interest in understanding and sensemaking is related to learning, within which phenomenography is an acknowledged approach. As action research, participatory and designerly methods are developed and tested to facilitate transformation in a series of group meetings in a small communication firm, by engaging BtB network partners (suppliers, customers, advisors) in co-creating ideas and strategies on how and why they should transform. As phenomenography, participants were systematically interviewed about their experience before and after each group meeting for thorough analysis. The preliminary results are

promising; not only did Kalb transform their business model and economic performance, but they also changed their network position and customer portfolio, based on the BtB relationship insights and value clarification that took place. The methodological pluralism inherent in the investigation of this process by combining Semantic, Metaphor and Implemented analysis as a triangular approach brings new insights on the responsiveness between the imagined business model transformation and the implemented transformation. Clarified values (rather than profit) became the main driver for transformation and growth.

The empirical context is the Danish advertising and communication industry, which has been rapidly changing the past decade. Firms within this industry have tried to adapt and change the way they do business to be able to keep creating value for customers. Yet they are challenged by

A business model can be defined as a broad conceptual frame addressing how value is created, delivered and getting paid for, and is characterized by the interdependent nature of its components. Although widespread in practice, and receiving extensive attention in research, two knowledge gaps are centre of my research attention; one is on how managers can guide the development and design of business

model transformation yet acknowledge its inherent network interdependency, and another is on knowing more about micro-processes when business models transform, including the cognition and sensemaking processes behind this. Hence the responsiveness between imagining and implementing business model transformation is at play.

rapid technological and macro-economic changes indicated by internet-based marketing and communication revenue tripling, whereas more traditional printed media has rapidly decreased. These changes have not only influenced the allocation of resources in the industry, but also challenged the understanding of the role these firms play in value creation. However, the survival and growth of these small firms matters; SMEs contribute with of 38% of total employment, and 52% of the total revenue in Denmark.

Two preliminary contributions to methodology are made from this quasi-experimental study; one for Data collection, and another for Data analysis. For Data collection a series of group sessions with participatory and design-inspired innovation methods are developed and applied, to engage a single firm and its BtB network partners in co-creating ideas. Before and after each session, individual reflective phenomenographic semi-structured interviews are conducted with each participant, to detect business model transformation over time. To enable Data analysis of the participants' experience in a phenomenographic manner, as well as the business effectiveness of the process and methods, three different approaches are applied to provide a triangular perspective; Semantics (words) and Metaphor (projected meaning), as well as the more typical in management: Implemented (effectiveness) analysis. This novel combination of analysis are made for considering experience through what participants say, which metaphors they project into objects, as well as the effect this process has on improving the situation for the firm. It therefore brings new insights to business model theory on the micro-processes at play, including a significant effect on the priorities at Kalb, with strong focus on BtB relationship values and better usage of their expertise, ending up doing more of what they love through network sourcing integration, and in addition 47% increase in revenue.

## Department of Entrepreneurship and Relationship Management

The Department of Entrepreneurship and Relationship Management is located at the University of Southern Denmark, campus Kolding, and employs approximately 85 people. This location is central to the growth centres within the Triangle Region and offers a unique opportunity to close cooperation with the companies and public authorities in the region in respect to research and educational projects.

For several years the research of the department has been based on learning networks with companies and trade promotion institutions. In addition to this, the department has a long tradition of problem-based cooperation across traditional business research areas and very often by means of external funding. The research of the department concentrates on two key areas: entrepreneurship and relationship management and originates from traditional research areas such as marketing, applied economics, accounting, operation management and organization.

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