

Business to Business Relationships: The Variables in the Context of Success

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Abstract

Distinctive feature of a modern market is close relationships among business companies seeking their goals. It is possible to achieve the goals when success of the relationships is ensured. The aim of the article is to systemize the success variables of business to business relationships. After the discussion about reasons of building and sustaining business to business relationships, business to business relationship types and formats, as well as the essence of success in the relationships, analysis of business to business success variables is carried out in two parts of the article: at first, the variables that affect the success of relationships sustained by different business subjects (buyers-sellers, supplier-distributor, producer-dealer, service providers and institutional consumers) are examined; secondly, the variables that have impact on different dimensions of relationships and thus lead to relationship success, are analysed.

Keywords: business to business relationships, dimensions of business to business relationships, variables of success.

Introduction

Many industries rely on their relationships with stakeholders – customers, employees, as well as those with suppliers and partners, investors and market analysts, and even government regulators, trade associations and other entities that influence the general business climate. Ford et al. (2003) highlight that management of relationships among all business stakeholders have become the critical task on which a company's very existence stands or falls. An increasing number of businesses have recognized the benefits of establishing and nurturing ongoing relationships with their stakeholders. Many have begun to shift their emphasis from discrete transactions toward shaping longer-term, mutually beneficial exchange relationships (Claycomb and Martin, 2001). The wealth embedded in relationships is now more important than the capital contained in the land, factories, buildings, goods and even bank accounts (Galbreath, 2002). The age of relationships is marked by tailor product and services to customer wishes and needs. Such access is determined by a seller and a buyer (in the broadest sense); relationships get the form of relationships between a provider and a customer.

Business relationships can be defined as a process where many organizations form strong and extensive

social, economic, service and technical ties over time, with intent of lowering total costs and/or increasing value, thereby achieving mutual benefit (Ritter et al., 2004; Schurr, 2007). In most business to business exchanges, striving for building and sustaining long-term relationships serves as a key target for successful business activities. Companies more often pay attention to the successful relationships among interacting parties for mutual benefit.

There is extensive research about business to business relationships. Archer and Yuan (2000) investigate how ad hoc market relationships may become collaborative relationships. Lehtonen (2004) notes the success of a relationship requires the establishment and execution of clearly defined goals. The variables of successful relationships are investigated by Gil-Saura et al. (2009), Powers and Reagan (2007), Cheng (2006), Gounaris (2005), Castro et al. (2005), Lages et al. (2005), Heffernan (2004), Wright (2004), Adobor and McMullen (2002), Gittell (2002), Garbarino and Johnson (1999), Mohr and Spekman (1994), Ganesan (1994), Morgan and Hunt (1994), Anderson and Narus (1990). Wright (2004) emphasizes strategic and cultural fit in relationships, also risk sharing, resource allocation and knowledge exchange. Extensive person-to-person contacts for successful relationships are highlighted by Nielson (1998). Powers and Reagan (2007) point out the importance of business to business relationships success for firms' reputation, performance satisfaction, possibilities of alternatives, mutual goals, technology, non-retrievable investments, adaptation, structural bonds. According to Rauyruen and Miller (2007), a higher construct for successful relationships is the quality of relationships. Cheng (2006) points out longevity, frequency of contact, efficient and satisfactory service as well as the skills and personalities of company representatives as success of relationships. According to Galbreath (2002), the key ingredient for partners' relationship success is collaboration and communication via electronic integration. Cohen (2006) shows that in organizations cooperative behaviour is based upon the operation of a system of inter-organizational norms, which are common understandings about the ways of conducting business through the facilitation of interaction within a social system. These relationships may be characterized by motives that could involve mutually compatible as well as incompatible goals. When these attributes exist in partner relationships, the partner businesses recognize their interdependence and are committed to work towards beneficial relationships.

In spite of the fact that a lot of research in business to business relationships has already been performed, several questions are still open. First of all, it is unclear which variables leading to successful relationships are universal and equally meaningful for buyer-seller, manufacturer – dealer, distributor – supplier, and provider – consumer relationships. Secondly, it is interesting which of these variables have an impact on economical results that influence more emotional content of relationships. Thirdly, relationships get into evolution; therefore, it is worth to know which variables lead to relationship success at the moment of building, embedding or ending the relationships. Forth, business to business relationships are multidimensional phenomenon, so it is useful to find out which variables have impact on different dimensions. Answers to these questions would help to solve the problem of managing business to business relationships in a way that that they would be mutually beneficial to all interacting business subjects.

The aim of the article is to systemize the success variables of business-to business relationships.

The research methods employed in the article are research literature and comparative analysis.

In the first part of the article, reasons for building and sustaining business to business relationships are identified, business to business relationship types and formats are distinguished and the essence of success in the relationships is highlighted. In the second part of the article, analysis of business to business success variables is carried out in two steps: at first, the variables that affect the success of relationships sustained by different business subjects (buyers-sellers, supplier-distributor, producer-dealer, service providers and institutional consumers) are identified; secondly, the variables that have impact on different relationship dimensions and thus lead to relationship success are pointed out.

Reasons for entering business to business relationships

Business to business relationships are a process where two or many firms form strong and extensive social, economic, service, and technical ties over time. There are various reasons to establish business to business relationships. According to Castro et al. (2005), business to business relationships appear a valuable resource essential for the economic performance. Gummesson (1999) notes that businesses in relationships are leveraging knowledge about customers and other market's actors (e.g. employees, partners, providers, investors) for transforming their products and services into memorable experiences that create unique value. Buttle (2008) points out five reasons for creating and maintaining the relationships: (1) product complexity, (2) product strategic significance, (3) service requirements, (4) financial risk and (5) reciprocity. Hedaa and Ritter (2005) note that the development of business to business (B2B) relationships has had different objects of orientations: (1) production/competence; (2) product/offering; (3) marketing orientation/solution; (4) customer orientation/problem; (5) networks. Biggemann and Buttle (2004) note that significant amongst the reasons

for companies wanting to build relationships is the value that relationships generate. Eisingerich and Bell (2008) indicate three reasons which impel business to business service providers to make relationships. Firstly, long-term exchanges between firms are important in a services marketing context. As services are intangibles, business customers have difficulties to evaluate service quality. As relational exchange transpires over time, exchange partners may benefit from reduced uncertainty, exchange efficiency and effective collaboration. Secondly, most service providers currently face intense competition and incur substantial costs in their development of new services. The relationships with other actors that provide highly specialized activities can facilitate profitable de-integration of value chains and increase innovation by facilitating greater specialization of both inputs and outputs. In other words, this 'flexible specialization' may lead to improved efficiency, reduced input prices and greater speed to market. Third, in a business to business service context, the networks can be especially important because strong business linkages between firms can result in complementarities with respect to resources, which can facilitate the provision of integrated solutions. Moreover, openness to new and diverse exchange partners facilitates access to new technologies and service know-how.

Type and formats of business to business relationships

A variety of reasons for entering business to business relationships influence different types of these relationships: partnerships, joint ventures or strategic alliances (Donaldson and O'Toole, 2007), trade associations, interlocking directorates and networks (Barringer and Harrison, 2000). Today traditional markets are being replaced by networks (Moller and Halinen, 1999). Organizations oriented to networks should have skills to manage relationships. According to Ritter and Gemunden (2003), these skills might be considered network competence that is determined by such factors as access to resources, network orientation of human resource management, integration of intra-organizational communication and openness of corporate culture. Networks of value-creating relationships minimize transaction costs and provide access to valuable group resources and capabilities. In addition, internal markets may permit firms to transfer financial resources so as to reduce risk, and ensure network survival. These advantages may be more pronounced in emerging markets, where external markets are less efficient (Estrin et al., 2009). Lay and Moore (2009) distinguish two types of business networks: (1) collaborative network and (2) coordinated network. Collaborative network might be characterized by high complexity, outgrowth of project teams and focus on expertise, innovation and market development; is organized around orchestrator and is relationship oriented. On the other hand, coordinated network is transaction oriented, has high volume, is organized around a concentrator and its outgrowth is value chains. Relationship management in business networks is complex because the cooperation and joint involvement are

advocated the multiplicity and different format of relationships. Johnston and Clark (2008) suggest two main formats of business and customer relationships: (1) relationship based on a portfolio of service products frequently found in higher volume operations and (2) personal relationship created between an individual customer and an employee, particularly prevalent in low-volume professional organizations. These authors also cover temporary relationships, recognising transactional, one-off nature of many services. Donaldson and O'Toole (2007, p. 60) distinguish four types of relationships: close, dominant partner, recurrent and discrete. The authors point out that these types of relationships differ on contributed assets, communication, type of cooperation, trust, time horizon, flexibility, information sharing and norms. In the field of professional services Dawson (2005) differentiates six formats of relationships under the following criteria: 1) services scope (focused or broad), 2) supplier diversity (single incumbent or many suppliers), 3) engagement duration (brief engagement or long-term contract), 4) transaction frequency (many small or infrequent large), 5) range of client contact (individual/department or entire organization), and 6) interaction style (online or frequent face-to-face).

Notion of business to business relationships' success

What is success of business-to business relationships? Tuten and Urban (2001) emphasize the volume of sales attributed to both parties (objective measure) and satisfaction with business relationships (affective measure) as success of business to business relationships. Medina-Munoz and Garciaa-Falcoan (2000) describe success in a very similar way. According to these researchers, there are two distinct approaches to the success of business to business relationships. One approach associates the success of business to business relationships with partners' overall satisfaction with the relationship. Satisfaction refers to organization's positive experience as regards its partners' ability to obey rules and fulfil performance expectations. The second approach defines a quantitative measure of the mutual benefit that participants reap from the relationships. In general, the business-to business relationships might be considered as successful according to how fully its goals have been satisfied. Service quality signifies responding to customer expectations. Quality is particularly important to service providing firms because it has been shown to increase profit levels, reduce costs and increase market shares. Moreover, service quality has been shown to influence purchase intentions and is used by some firms to strategically position themselves in the marketplace (Meng and Elliott, 2009), also positively affects one of behavioural outcomes – loyalty (Rauyruen and Miller, 2007). In other words, successful relationships enable partners to do more and create more value by focusing on core competencies and letting others do things they can do better.

Success variables in business to business relationships

First of all, we analyze the success variables considering the entrants into relationships. Research literature distinguishes the relationships as *sellers-buyers* (Metcalf et al., 1992; Wray et al., 1994; Wilson, 1995; Nielson, 1998; Selnes, 1998; Cannon and Homburg, 2001; Sanzo et al., 2003; Varey et al., 2005; Narayandas and Rangan, 2004; Powers and Reagan, 2007; Kaunonen and Uusitalo, 2009 and others), *suppliers-distributors* (Smith et al., 1997; Hogarth-Scott, 1999; Jonsson and Zineldin, 2003; Kim and Hsieh, 2003; Kingshott and Pecotich, 2007; Kim et al., 2009 and others), *manufacturers-dealers* (Roger and Jule, 1999; Biller et al., 2002; Bigne and Blesa, 2003; Izquierdo and Cillan, 2004; Wu et al., 2004; Tuang and Stringer, 2008; Ono and Kubo, 2009; and others), *providers-consumers* (Shemwell et al., 1998; Price and Arnould, 1999; Arantola, 2002; Jones et al., 2009; Bagdoniene and Jakstaite, 2009 and others) relationships. The expression of success variables in mentioned entrants of relationships is summarized in Figure 1.

The second part of our study elaborates on the success variables considering the dimensions of business to business relationships. Castro et al. (2005) distinguish time, structure, process, substance and functions, Biggemann and Buttle (2004) – value as relationships dimensions. Therefore, relationship success variables may be analysed through the prism of these dimensions.

Time dimension of business to business relationships and success variables

The relationships are dynamic; this means they evolve over time. Time acts as a container for business relationships (Medlin, 2004). The researchers discuss several stages of the relationships process (Table 1). Relationship development might be described with reference to experience, uncertainty, distance and commitment (Castro et al., 2005). All these features of relationships vary over time. The building of the relationship usually might be characterize by uncertainty. Trust seems to essentially be a means for people to deal with uncertainty about the future and their interaction partners (Ruohomaa and Kutvonen, 2005). Trust defines one party's optimistic expectations from other party's behaviour (Lewicki et al, 1998). Suh et al (2006) point out that expectations are always associated with positive behavioural outcomes. Cowles (1996) argues that trust occurs when one party, seeking target and putting something valuable for him/her, assume that it may be relied on other party's knowledge, competence and motives, which encourages associate relationship. In most cases the uncertainty is reduced by relationships transparency (Eggert and Helm, 2003). Transparency is based on the perception of information exchange and of the important characteristics of the interaction partner. Thus, at the beginning of relationships, in order to overcome the uncertainty, trust and transparency have great significance. If parties of the relationships trust each other and begin to work in a transparent manner, one may assume that such relationship will be successful.

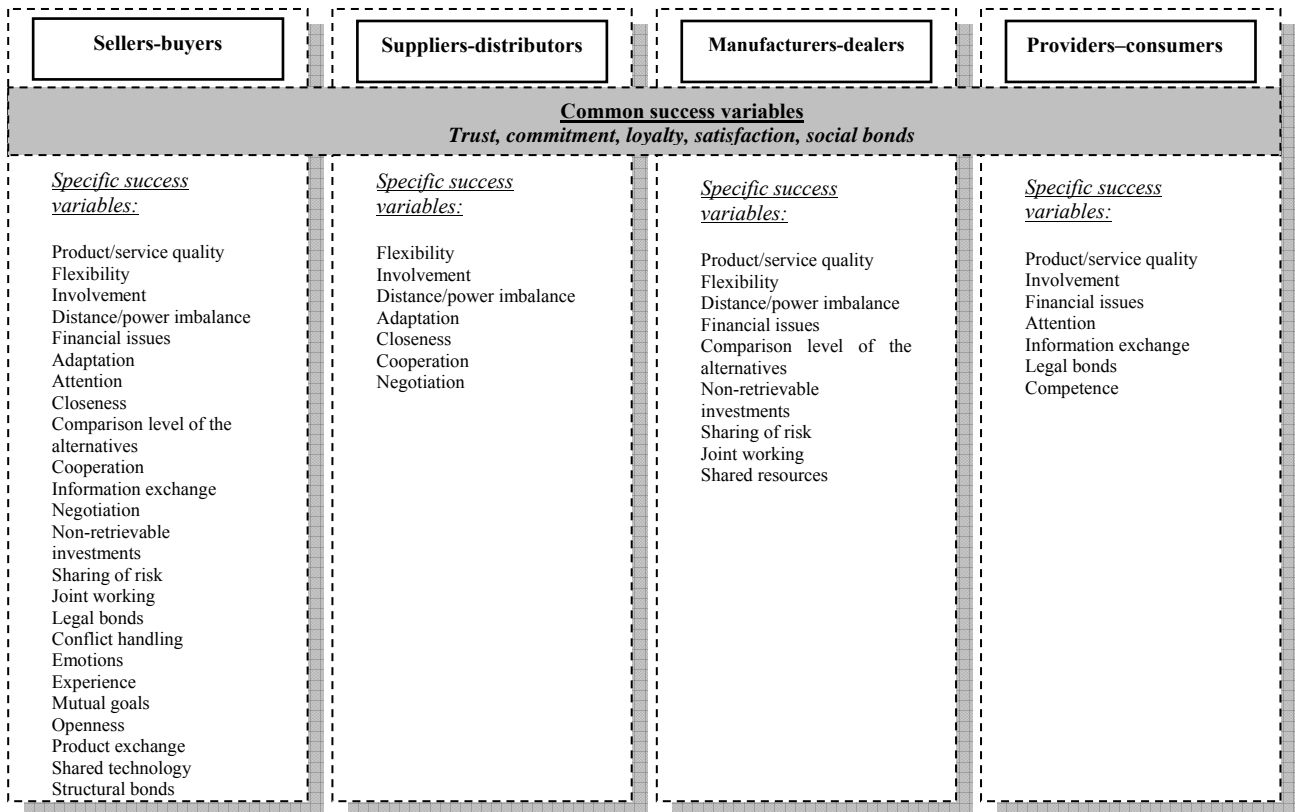


Figure 1. Common and specific success variables in different types of business to business relationships

Table 1

The stages of business to business relationships process

Dwyer et al. (1987)	Gronroos (1994)	Williams (1998)	Ford et al. (2003)	Dawson (2005)	Brooks (2008)
full mutual awareness	initiative	awareness	pre-relationship	engaging	emerging
exploration	purchase	exploration	exploratory	aligning	growth
expansion	use of the product	expansion	developing	deepening	maturity
commitment		commitment	stable	partnering	declining
dissolution		dissolution			

Interacting parties get to development of their relationships: share knowledge and skills, observe one another, feel effect of the interaction. In other words, they acquire experience. According to Hess et al. (2007), openness, attention, and involvement decrease distance between interacting parties. Nielson (1998) suggests closeness might enhance the stability and longevity of relationships. At the relationship-building stage, as well as relationship embedding stage, trust is very significant. Trust is many-sided, so in various stages of relationship development, different trust dimensions are highlighted. Svensson (2004) notes that trust manifests by dependability/reliability, honesty, buyer/seller orientation and friendliness. Trust may also be expressed as hope, faith, confidence, assurance, initiative (Lewicki et al., 1998), ability and congruence (Sitkin and Roth, 1993),

benevolence (Mayer et al., 1995), predictability (Coleman, 1990; Dasgupta, 1988), common values (Eriksson and Lindvall, 2000; Gillespie and Mann, 2004), consistency, commitment and capability (Hacker et al., 2001). The more partners trust in one another, the more they appreciate their relationships. Trust becomes a key condition for the continuity of relationships (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Sharma and Pattersson, 1999) and their success (Kramer and Tyler, 1995). According to Smaliukiene (2005), trust encourages open communication between partners, exchange of ideas and sharing of resources. Business relationships between provider and customer based on trust may growth into personal relations. In relationships deepening (expansion or maturity) stage success is assured by commitment and loyalty. As Gil-Saura et al. (2009) suggest, commitment together with trust is a key mediating

variable for relationships and achieve valuable outcomes. Relationships commitment might be defined as a belief that the relationships are worth the expenditure of effort required to ensure its survival (Hausman and Johnston, 2009) or consumer's voluntary willingness to sustain in and make efforts towards sustaining relationships and can be thought of as the foundation on which relationships are built (Dagger et al., 2009). Committed customers experience closeness of relationships, which over time leads to confidence about the relationships.

Loyalty is considered as the degree to which a customer exhibits repeated purchasing behaviour from a provider, possesses a positive attitudinal disposition toward the provider and considers using only this provider when a need for this product arises (Gil-Saura et al., 2009). Loyal customer offers a steady stream of revenue for a firm by remaining with the brand/supplier and rejecting the overtures of competitors (Rauyrueen and Miller, 2007). B2B client loyalty is linked to relationship quality, trust, involvement, satisfaction, purchase development, organizational change, and switching costs (Rauyrueen and Miller, 2007). These three coherent variables – satisfaction, trust and commitment – compose relationship quality that reflects the overall nature of relationships between providers and consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). Hill (2007) argues that the higher the quality of this relationship, the more likely sales, loyalty and repeated consumption will ensue.

Relationship ending has, however, not recognized the potential underlying relationship tension because of cumulative negative experiences as an aspect that influences ending (Holmlund-Rytkonen and Strandvik, 2005). In order to sustain relationships, mutual satisfaction of relationships should be incurred through experience. Satisfaction and experience are related. Satisfaction is a process of evaluating or measuring a purchase experience where expectations are compared with the result (Gil-Saura et al., 2009) or may be conceptualized as an attitudinal judgment about purchase (Jayawardhena et al., 2007). Satisfaction leads to the development of trust and commitment, which, as mentioned above, are important to maintain long-term relationships (Powers and Reagan, 2007), to retain customers (Rauyrueen and Miller, 2007), and to increase profitability and market share (Meng and Elliott, 2009).

Structure dimension of business to business relationships and success variables

Business relationships might be described by continuity, complexity, symmetry and informality which are appropriate to relationship structure (Castro et al., 2005). *Continuity* is derived from the maintenance of business transactions over time, following contracted steps repeatedly. It focuses on anticipation of future interaction between firms. Wilson and Nielson (2001) note that continuity may be defined as suppliers' perceptions of future exchange expectations between relationship partners. Continuity refers to the time during which a firm maintains the relationships with other various firms (Kamp, 2005). This structure dimension of B2B

relationships is induced by satisfaction (Dagger et al., 2009) and commitment (Powers and Reagan, 2007). Continuity of relationships also depends on negotiation which might be described as a process to reach a joint decision on issues in dispute (Weigand et al., 2003).

Complexity may be given by the number, type and the contact pattern of parts involved in business relationships. The variety of ways along which the relationships can be exploited for different purposes also determines complexity. Complexity of business relationships depends on the type of interdependence between organisations. In this case, relationships should be characterized by flexibility and rigidity (Ferrer-Balas and Buckland, 2008). Complexity requires effective coordination. According to Gittel (2006), if effective coordination is to occur, interacting parties should also be connected by relationships of shared goals and mutual respect. Mutual goals might be considered as common understanding or focused alignment of expectations in communicative way (Davis and Walker, 2007).

Symmetry is a typical situation in industrial markets, unlike many consumer markets, because both buyers and sellers have resources and capabilities, and this tends to give rise to more balanced situations. In relationships management there is an emphasis on the necessity for symmetry and mutuality and that symmetric dependence structures foster longer-term relationships based on trust, whilst asymmetric relationships are associated with less stability and more conflict (Hingley, 2005). Symmetrical interdependence exists when parties are equally dependent on each other (Caniels and Gelderman, 2005). Relationships that are power-balanced tend to be more stable than unbalanced ones and as one party in a relationship is seen to gain power, then the other will seek to rebalance power (Hingley, 2005).

Finally, *informality* is the most common in business contexts, although formal contracts exist, and has been identified as more effective in problem solving. Karkoulian et al. (2008) notes the success of relationships depends on the strength of the interpersonal relationships and the informality of the process. Informality has a consistently positive effect on interorganizational learning of tacit knowledge. Therefore, where informal learning behaviours abound while more tacit knowledge flow between organizations is undesirable, the partners may need to curb informal interactions. This can be achieved by introducing formal mechanisms that block opportunities for knowledge sharing (Janowicz-Panjaitan and Noorderhaven, 2008).

Process dimension of business to business relationships and success variables

The process dimension of B-to-B relationships is described by adaptations, cooperation and conflict, social interaction and routinization. Mutual *adaptations* are essential for relationships to develop as they demand coordination of activities, resources and individuals, and often reflect commitment. Adaptations are often a direct and conscious attempt by firms to improve the nature of their business relationship and the benefits that they derive from it. Adaptations often lead to the creation of

relationships specific assets, such as personal relationships and trust (Schmidt et al., 2007). Personal relationships constitute the underlying basis of long-term relationships between the provider and customer organizations in complex service settings. Personal friendships and liking by the exchange parties is crucial in developing loyalty (Lian and Laing, 2007). Woo and Ennew (2004) note that inter-firm adaptations imply considerable investments by one or both of the firms and have a significant influence on the provider's ability to conduct business with a particular customer and on the customer's ability to secure needed products. They also highlight the investments made in inter-firm adaptations often cannot be transferred to other business relationships – they are relationship specific. Consequently, the parties become tied together. Last, the adaptations may have important consequences for the long-term competitiveness of the firms. From a business to business relationship perspective, cooperative behaviour includes the coordination tasks which are undertaken jointly and singly to pursue common and/or compatible goals and activities undertaken to develop and maintain the relationship.

Cooperation and conflict coexist in business relationships. This results from the need to cope with win-win strategies even when conflicts persist. Cooperation includes joint technical problem solving, reciprocity, continuity, concerns with profitability, willingness to make cooperative changes, and owing favours (Woo and Ennew, 2004). According to Andersson et al. (2007), problems and conflicts should be solved through collaboration and cooperation, by adapting products and processes toward interacting parties. Successful partnerships must rely on constructive joint problem solving and persuasion (Mohr and Spekman, 1994).

Social interaction is an equally important element. Social interaction is a manifestation of social capital (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). Any organization is not available without people, as well as interorganizational relationships. Social exchange between the interacting firms is the root of the relationships (Gefen, 2004). This exchange builds strong relationships and creates interdependencies between the exchange parties (Terho and Halinen, 2007). Effective communication between firms as well as skills and traits of personnel, it should be required for strategic and cultural fit in order to develop successful B2B relationships. Employees should be interested in to be involved into mutual relationships. Mutual goals are the degree to which partners share goals that can be accomplished through joint action and the maintenance of the relationship (Powers and Reagan, 2007). Personnel's knowledge and skills give a firm competitive advantage because it is through this set of knowledge and skills that a firm is able to innovate new products/processes/services, or improve existing ones more efficiently and/or effectively (Cheng, 2006). Relationships allow communication to flow between parties (Biggemann and Buttle, 2004). According to Byer (2003), communication is the most important contributing factor to the success of any business. Communication and interaction between people may influence socialization. It enables tacit knowledge to be transferred between individuals through shared experience, space and time.

More importantly, socialization drives the creation and growth of personal tacit knowledge bases. Knowledge creation starts with socialization, which is the process of converting new tacit knowledge through shared experiences in day-to-day social interaction (Karkoulian et al., 2008). Social bonding is the bond that holds buyer and seller closely together in a personal sense, including personal interactivity and feelings of personal closeness (Stanko et al., 2007).

Routinization means the process of emergence over time of routines, implicit rules of behaviour, and some rituals, especially in the most important relationships. As Karapetrovic et al. (2007) note, sustainability in the relationships process may be accepted by routinization. It might be considered as re-establishing their current relationships with the other actors.

Substance and functions dimension of business to business relationships and success variables

Each business relationships are a process in which connections between companies are created and developed involving activities, resources, and actors. These connections originate a quasi-organization, where something unique is produced that, otherwise, the parties involved could not effectively achieve. The elements that connect the focal relationship are a distinctive factor from which three main effects can be derived the effects for both individual organisations and for the focal relationship, also for third parties that may interplay in the involving network.

Business relationships might be termed a quasi-organization with its own goals, culture, organization structure and communications mechanisms formed through evolving collaboration of the parties. Stretching the boundary of the firm to include its dyadic relationships gives rise to the concept of an extended enterprise within which operation employees have responsibilities not only to their own legal firm employer but also to the extended enterprise. This quasi-organization, or extended enterprise, allows the parties to exploit their complementarities (Harland, 1997). Joint working refers to joint or mutual decision-making and problem solving. Joint action has been defined as the degree of interpenetration of organizational boundaries. It is similar to the shared problem solving dimension (Wilson and Nielson, 2001). The relationships might be described as a working relationship where partners work closely together to achieve mutual goals (Huntley, 2006).

Value dimension of business to business relationships and success variables

Significant amongst the reasons for companies wanting to build relationships is the value that relationships generate. Value might be thought as the difference or ratio between costs and benefits. Biggemann and Buttle (2004) distinguish personal, financial, knowledge and strategic value. Personal value is more central to the feelings and emotions and might be considered as emotional value (emotional satisfaction).

Personal value led to retention of relationships and positive referrals, financial value might be connected to economic satisfaction and is indicated by increased efficiency, more shares of market and willingness to pay more. Knowledge value is expressed in market intelligence, idea-generation and innovation outcomes. Knowledge value enables innovative solutions to emerge, improves mutual understanding and promotes trust. Strategic value of the relationships allows better planning, reduces risks, makes possible better utilisation of the assets, and provides a foundation on which business can be built. Strategic value also exists if firms improve their competitiveness as a result of the relationships in which they are engaged (Biggemann and Buttle, 2004).

Conclusions

In the contemporary market the wealth embedded into relationships is more important than the financial capital or other assets. Knowledge, financial resources, product complexity, financial risk, competition, customer needs and requirements, remote market there are some of the reasons for building and sustaining long-term business to business relationships. Entrants in business to business relationships may compose different groups such as sellers-buyers, suppliers-distributors, manufacturers-dealers, providers-consumers etc. Business to business relationships are materialized as partnerships, joint ventures or strategic alliances, trade associations, interlocking directorates and networks.

All entrants in business to business relationships are interested to affiliate and sustain successful relationships. The success of business to business relationships might be considered according to mutual benefit that participants obtain from the relationships and the satisfaction with the business relationships. The success depends on many different variables. Summarizing the results of our analysis of research publications, it may be stated that sellers-buyers relationships comparing to other entrants in relationships are the most frequently analyzed by researchers. They examined nearly thirty factors affecting buyers-sellers relationships. Almost half of the success variables are identified during the investigation of suppliers-distributors, manufacturers-dealers and providers-consumers relationships. In spite of this, commitment, loyalty, trust, satisfaction and social bonds are the most often considered as relationship success variables. This might be noted about all examined parties sustaining the relationships: buyers-sellers, suppliers-distributors, manufacturers-dealers and providers-consumers. Business to business relationships are described by time, structure, process, substance and functions, and value dimensions. Researchers pay the most attention to success variables with links to the relationship value and process dimensions. Somewhat less success variables are mentioned in the investigation of relationship time and structure dimensions. We did not find any variables that would affect all five relationship dimensions. Mutual goals and legal bonds have effect on relationship structure, process, substance and functions as well as value

dimensions, satisfaction – relationship time, structure, process and value dimensions.

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Verslas-verslui ryšių sėkmei įtaką darantys veiksniai

Santrauka

Šiuolaikinėje rinkoje verslo įmonės tikslų siekia bendradarbiaudamos. *Verslas-verslui* ryšiais įvardijamas procesas, kai du ar daugiau juos užmezgančių ir palaikančių subjektų užmezga ekonominius, socialinius, funkcinus, struktūrinius, techninius ir kt. santykius. Straipsnio tikslas – susisteminti *verslas-verslui* ryšių sėkmę lemiančius veiksnius. Siekiant šio tikslo, pirmiausiai straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kas skatina *verslas-verslui* ryšių užmezgimą. Išanalizavus Buttle (2008), Eisingerich, Bell (2008), Castro ir kt. (2005), Hedaa, Ritter (2005), Biggemann, Buttle (2004), Gummesson (1999) požiūrius, nustatyta, kad *verslas-verslui* ryšius užmezgti skatina ekonominiai interesai, kompetencijos nepakankamumas, žinių apie vartotojus ir kitus rinkos dalyvius stygius, siekis sumažinti gaminamo produkto ar teikiamos paslaugos sudėtingumą, noras pasidalinti finansinę riziką, technologinė priklausomybė ir kt.

Apibūdinus priežastis, skatinančias verslo įmonių ryšius, nagrinėjami *verslas-verslui* ryšių tipai ir formatai. Skirtingi tikslai užmezgant ryšius lemia ryšių tipų įvairovę. *Verslas-verslui* ryšiai įgauna partnerystės, akcinių bendrovių, strateginių aljansų (Donaldson, O'Toole, 2007), prekybos asociacijų, jungtinių direkcijų arba tinklų formas (Barringer, Harrison, 2000). Šiuolaikinėje rinkoje vis dažniau bendradarbiaujama kuriant ryšių tinklus (Moller, Halinen, 1999). Kuriančios tinklus verslo įmonės turi pasižymėti gebėjimais valdyti skirtingų formatų ryšius. Johnston, Clark (2008, p. 86) apibūdina du pagrindinius verslo įmonės ir vartotojo ryšių formatus: 1) santykiai, susiję su paslaugų portfeliu, dažniausiai būdingi stambaus masto operacijoms ir 2) asmeniniai santykiai, kurie užsimezga tarp verslo įmonės darbuotojo ir vartotojo atstovo; šie santykiai paplitę nedidelėse profesionalių paslaugų įmonėse. Johnston ir Clark (2008) tvirtina, kad šie ryšiai skiriasi savo indėliu, komunikacija, kooperacijos lygiu, pasitikėjimu, laiko horizontu, lankstumu, informacijos pasidalijimu ir vertybių perėmimu. Dawson (2005) kontrasto principu skiria šešis ryšių formatus. Mokslininkas

nurodo, kad pagal paslaugų aprėptį ryšiai gali būti sufokusuoti arba apimantys platų paslaugų spektrą; pagal teikėjų įvairovę – ryšiai su vienu ar keliais teikėjais arba ryšiai su daugeliu teikėjų; pagal išpareigojimų trukmę – trumpalaikio arba ilgalaikio išpareigojimo ryšiai; pagal sąveikos periodiškumą – dažnai pasikartojantys ir reti; pagal ryšių diapazoną – ryšiai su individu/padaliniu arba visa įmone; pagal sąveikos pobūdį – elektroniniais kanalais palaikomi ryšiai arba *akis į akį* ryšiai.

Anot Tuten, Urban (2001), *verslas-verslui* ryšių sėkmė gali būti vertinama verslo subjektų pardavimų dydžiais (objektyvus matas) ir pasitenkinimu ryšiais (emocinis matmuo). Panašios nuomonės laikosi ir Medina-Munoz su Garciaa-Falcoan (2000). Šių autorių nuomone, pasitenkinimas reiškia įmonės teigiamą patirtį, susiklosčiusią bendradarbiaujant su partneriu, kuris laikosi taisyklių ir pateisina bendros veiklos vykdymo lūkesčius. Kiekybinė ryšių sėkmės apraška yra bendra nauda, kurią gauna ryšiais susieti verslo subjektai. Apibendrinant galima teigti, kad ryšių sėkmė įgalina verslo įmones sukurti didesnę vertę, fokusuojantis į savo šerdinę kompetenciją, o kitas veiklas perduodant tiems partneriams, kurie tai gali atlikti geriau ir greičiau.

Straipsnyje išanalizavus *verslas-verslui* ryšių užmezgimą ir palaikymą skatinančias priežastis, *verslas-verslui* ryšių tipus bei formatus, taip pat ryšių sėkmės esmę, *verslas-verslui* sėkmės veiksnių analizė atliekama dviem pjūviais: pirma, nagrinėjama, kokie veiksniai lemia skirtingų verslo subjektų (pardavėjų-pirkėjų, tiekėjų-distributorių, gamintojų-dilerių, paslaugų teikėjų ir organizacijos vartotojų) ryšių sėkmę, ir, antra, kokie veiksniai daro įtaką skirtingoms ryšių dimensijoms ir taip lemia ryšių sėkmę. Apibendrinus mokslinės literatūros analizės rezultatus, galima tvirtinti, kad mokslininkai kur kas dažniau tyrinėja pardavėjų-pirkėjų nei kitų ryšių užmezgančių subjektų bendradarbiavimo sėkmės veiksnius. Jie ištyrė beveik tris dešimtis veiksnių, darančių įtaką pardavėjų-pirkėjų santykiams. Beveik perpus mažiau sėkmės veiksnių identifiukuota tiriant tiekėjų-distributorių, gamintojų-dilerių, taip pat paslaugų teikėjų ir organizacijos vartotojų ryšius. Išpareigojimas, pasitikėjimas ir socialiniai santykiai dažniausiai įvardijami ryšių sėkmės veiksniais. Tai pasakytina apie visas tirtąsias ryšius palaikančias puses: pardavėjus-pirkėjus, tiekėjus-distributorius, gamintojus-dilerius ir paslaugų teikėjus ir organizacijos vartotojus. *Verslas-verslui* ryšiai – daugiadimensis reiškinys. Jie nusakomi laiku, struktūra, procesu, turiniu ir funkcijomis (Castro ir kt., 2005) ir verte (Biggemann, Buttle, 2004). Straipsnio autorių nagrinėtoje mokslinėje literatūroje mokslininkai daugiausia dėmesio skyrė sėkmės veiksniams, turintiems sąsajų su santykių verte ir proceso dimensijomis. Kiek mažiau sėkmės veiksnių identifiukuota tiriant *verslas-verslui* ryšių laiko ir struktūros dimensijas. Neišskirtas nė vienas veiksnys, kuris turėtų įtakos visoms penkioms šių ryšių dimensijoms. Abipusiai pasižadėjimai ir teisiniai išpareigojimai veikia *verslas-verslui* ryšių struktūros, proceso, turinio ir funkcijų, taip pat vertės dimensijas. Kitaip tariant, visas ryšių dimensijas, išskyrus laiko. Pasitenkinimas kaip *verslas-verslui* ryšių sėkmės veiksnys veikia laiko, struktūros, proceso ir vertės dimensijas.

Raktiniai žodžiai: *verslas-verslui* ryšiai, *verslas-verslui* ryšių dimensijos, sėkmės veiksniai.

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