

Actor Bonds in Situations of Discontinuous Business Activities

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Abstract:

Demand in many industrial buying situations, e.g. project purchases or procurement related to virtual organizations, is discontinuous. In situations of discontinuity, networks are often more of an ad hoc informational and social nature, as strong activity and resource links are not present. Furthermore the governance structure of markets characterized by discontinuous business activities is either that of the “socially constructed market” (Skaates, 2000) or that of the (socially constructed) network (Håkansson and Johanson, 1993). Additionally relationships and actor bonds vary substantially in situations of discontinuity. Therefore an analysis and comparison of relevant concepts that capture the key generative of features of actor bonds in both socially constructed networks and socially constructed markets is undertaken. These concepts include the “milieu” of project marketing (Cova *et al.*, 1996) and the institutional concept of the “field”. Finally this paper introduces the concept of “social capital” (Bourdieu, 1983) and discusses whether it can be used to conceptualize the dynamic features of actor bonds in situations of discontinuity.

Introduction

In the past two decades, the importance of relationships in marketing has been recognized (Grönroos, 1999; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Sheth and Parvitiyar, 1995). Concurrently, however, there has been a relative lack of research of the role of actors and actor interpretations in business-to-business marketing (Andersen, 1995; Araujo and Easton, 1998; Holmen and Pedersen, 1999; Möller, 1994). Researchers affiliated with the IMP Group have studied networks of business relationships and structural factors that influence the stability of these relationships (see e.g. Håkansson, 1982; Möller, 1994; Turnbull and Valla, 1986). These factors include other business relationships that a given buyer or seller firm might have, as the sum of a firm’s relationships form part of the context in which specific buyer-seller transactions occur (Easton, 1992). In IMP Group research, relationships are commonly seen as being comprised of four elements (*ibid.*: 106-110):

1. Mutual orientation
2. Mutual dependence
3. Bonds, e.g. “economic, social, technical, logistical, administrative, informational, legal” (*ibid.*:108)

4. Relationship investments, i.e. “processes in which resources are committed in order to create, build or acquire assets which can be used in the future” (Johanson and Mattsson, 1986)

Business relationships are furthermore regarded as having structural (i.e. resource ties, activity links, institutional bonds), economic (i.e. investments and economic bonds), and social (i.e. commitment, trust, attraction, social bonds) dimensions (Holmlund and Törnroos, 1997). The social dimensions are attributable mainly to individuals within the firms in question (see e.g. Hallén, 1992); however, if actors in a firm have similar perceptions of their counterparts in a given business relationship these may be aggregated to the level of the firm (see e.g. Tikkanen, 1998), which is most often the unit of analysis from the IMP perspective (see e.g. *ibid.*, Ford, 1997; Håkansson, 1982). Commitment between individuals may be viewed as “the belief that a relationship is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it” (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust, in turn, is “an actor’s expectation of the other party’s competence and goodwill” (Blomqvist, 1997) and attraction successful appeal to other actors’ desires and tastes (Merriam Webster internet dictionary). Furthermore, drawing on Hallén (1992), social bonds are a result of varying degrees of trust, attraction, and commitment and often result in informal social and information-sharing activities outside of the structural activity links of the business relationship.

However, each individual relationship does not necessarily entail all of the above relationship characteristics. In international business, so-called “infra-structural” relationships are used to acquire information and to influence the framework in which business is conducted (Hallén, 1992). Furthermore, in project marketing and systems selling, demand for projects is often of a non-constant, on-and-off nature (Ahmed, 1993; Cova and Salle, 1997; Tikkanen, 1998). This is also the case in virtual or temporary organizations (Heumer, 1996; Ratcheva and Vyakarnam, 1999; Zettinig, 1998). Finally, in situations where most business activity has been terminated due to e.g. changed business conditions, social elements may remain (Havila and Wilkinson, 1997). In all of these situations most of the above-mentioned structural and economic elements (e.g. monetary resource ties or production- and delivery-related activity links, i.e. a substantial part of the resource ties and activity links of the so-called A-R-A model of Håkansson, 1987) are not present on the long-term. Thus these relationships can be said to be *discontinuous* (Cova and Salle, 1997; Hadjikhani, 1996; Mandják and Veres, 1998; Tikkanen, 1998).

It is the nature of actor bonds in discontinuous relationships that will be further examined in this paper. The IMP conceptual deficits with regard to these types of relationships are especially severe because most studies have focused upon situations of strong long-term resource and activity links (see e.g. Ahmed, 1993; Cova and Ghauri, 1996; Havila and Wilkinson, 1997; Holmen and Pedersen, 1999). Additionally, social network theory (applied to marketing-related themes in e.g. Cook and Emerson, 1978; Iacobucci and Hopkins, 1992) is not helpful in capturing key features of relationships in this situation, as it does not deal with actors’ interpretations (Araujo and Easton, 1996).

In the following section, the diversity of relationships and actor bonds in situations of discontinuity is examined. First, possible governance structures of markets that contain discontinuous relationships are conceptualized, and the primacy of actor interpretations in determining relationship characteristics in situations of discontinuity is established (see e.g. Holmen,

Pedersen, and Torvatn, 1999; Håkansson and Sharma, 1996; Johanson and Mattsson, 1992; Medlin and Quester, 1999; Möller, 1994). Thereafter Campbell's (1985) six buyer-seller relationship types are examined in relation to specific relationships.

Thereafter concepts that are capable of capturing the generative and governing features of actor bonds are examined. In connection with this point, understanding embeddedness and the dynamic processes of change caused by actors' interpretations becomes vital to understanding actor bonds in situations of discontinuity, due to the preeminence of the actor bonds. From a structuration perspective (Giddens, 1984), the field of institutional theory (Bourdieu, 1979; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Melin, 1989; Scott, 1995, see also Halinen and Törnroos, 1998) and the milieu of Cova, Mazet, and Salle, 1996 are introduced as similar conceptualizations of relevant environmental features which affect actor bonds.

Furthermore the framework of social, cultural, and symbolic capital (see e.g. Araujo, Bowey, and Easton, 1999; Araujo and Easton, 1998; Bourdieu, 1996, 1986, 1983; Coleman, 1990; Skaates, 1999, 2000) are explored with regard to the features of actor bonds. It is demonstrated that these types of capital have the power to capture certain generative features of actor bonds, yet that the existing literature does not satisfactorily answer the question of the uses and specificity of these concepts (see also Araujo and Easton, 1998). After elaboration of this point, general suggestions are made concerning the incorporation of the sum of these concepts in subsequent IMP studies of situations of relationships characterized by discontinuity. Here the point of departure is Håkansson and Snehota's (1995) conceptualization of activities, actors, and resources at the company, relationship, and network levels.

Possible Market Governance Structures in Situations of Discontinuous Demand

In situations of discontinuous business activities, the presence of long-term relationships and networks is not given beforehand (Cova and Ghauri, 1996; Cova and Salle, 1997). Therefore it is especially relevant to examine possible governance structures, as these may provide some information about the nature of actor bonds in these situations.

Håkansson and Johanson (1993) have stated that industrial markets are governed by (a) two alternative types of actor-internal forces (own interests versus general norms) and (b) two alternative types of actor exchange relations. General actor exchange relations are characterized by arms-length situational interplay between industry actors, which imply that market mechanisms, i.e. supply and demand, govern resource allocation. Specific relations imply the dominance of long-term relationship-based interactions between individual actors, which enable the involved actors to send complex message to each other and also undertake joint research-and-development and production improvement activities over time. These two types of internal and external forces are depicted in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Håkansson and Johanson's (1993) Classification of Governance Structures

		Internal Force is based on	
		Interests	Norms
External Force is Based on	Specific relations	<i>Network</i>	<i>Hierarchy</i>
	General relations	<i>Market</i>	<i>Culture, profession</i>

In the upper left-hand corner of Figure 1, in the *Network* cell, activities are governed by actors' different individual interests, which are channeled to each other via relationships between specific actors. In the upper right-hand corner we find the *Hierarchy*. Here interests have been replaced by norms that individuals follow, which are enforced through specific relations to other actors.

The *Market* is placed in the lower left-hand corner; here, actors also follow their own individual interests, but, in contrast to the *Network*, do not predominantly interact with specific other actors. This means that the actors are, on one hand, freer in relation to one another, yet on the other hand, they cannot take advantage of specific productivity gains that occur through specific joint production and development activities with other actors in the *Network* governance structure. The last cell, in the lower right-hand corner, is termed *Culture* or *Profession*. Here actions are once again governed by norms yet the external forces that ensure that the norms are followed are based on general, impersonal sanctions.

However, Skaates (2000) has argued that the distinction between "interests" and "norms" is in many situations not clear-cut. This is e.g. due to the complexity (see e.g. Cova *et al.*, 1996; Mandják and Veres, 1998; Tikkanen, 1998) as well as the fact that interests are embedded in the actors' normative and interpretive framework (Bourdieu, 1990; Cova *et al.*, 1996; Harris and Dibben, 1999; Johanson, Polsa, and Törnroos, 1999; Kavanagh and Kelly, 1999; Skaates, 2000; Tuusjärvi, 1999). Norms and conventions set boundaries for the industry actors' perception of attainable interests, thus also facilitating actor coordination (Coleman, 1990; Kadefors, 1995; Scott, 1995; Tuusjärvi, 1999).

Additionally, especially concerning the procurement of complex and knowledge-intensive goods and services, there may be *differences in know-how* between buyers and sellers (Backhaus, 1995); this implies that buyers may not know or be able to articulate all of their interests. However, this does not make the relationship between sellers and buyers purely dependent on existing norms and laws, as achieving sales in these situations still depends on convincing the buyer that one is taking his or her perceived interests into account (Løwendahl, 1997).

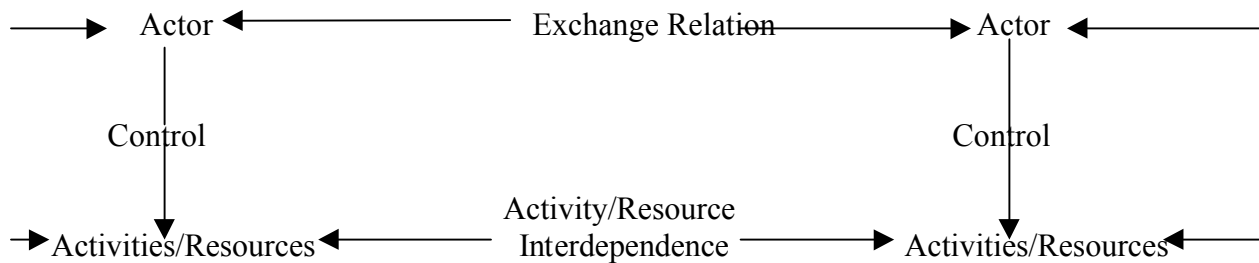
To relate this social constructive aspect to the common IMP A-R-A model (see e.g. Holmen, Pedersen, and Torvatn, 1999; Håkansson, 1987; Håkansson and Johanson, 1993; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Johanson and Mattsson, 1992), the A-R-A model conceptualizes relationships as being composed of actor (or social) bonds, activity links, and resource ties. The actor bonds are, however, preminent (see e.g. Holmen, Pedersen, and Torvatn, 1999; Håkansson and Johanson, 1993 and 1992; Håkansson and Sharma, 1996; Johanson and Mattsson, 1992; Medlin and

Quester, 1999; Möller, 1994), as actors are the only elements in the A-R-A model that have intentions and thus can create and implement businesses strategies (see e.g. Johanson and Mattsson, 1992). Thus strategy-related changes in the resource ties and activity links have to be attributed to actors. Secondly, also in the event of changes that originate externally or in activity links and resource ties, actor bonds are preeminent in explaining the nature of the relationship. This may be explained in a deductive manner using the following arguments (Medlin and Quester, 1999:2):

“First, while the nature of activity links and resource ties is influenced by interactions between the relationship and the firm and between the relationship and the network, the nature of the actor bonds has an important effect on how these interactions are viewed. Second, the nature of actor bonds has important effects in providing acceptable responses to changes in activity links and resource ties.”

Thus the predominance of actor bonds can be visualized within in the A-R-A framework as depicted in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2. Håkansson and Johanson’s (1993) Actors and Activities/Resources Model



On the basis of the above arguments concerning the social construction of networks and markets, the possible markets governance structures framework of Håkansson and Johanson (1993) will be modified to only include the “specific versus general relations” distinction, as depicted in Figure 3. This distinction will be the only governance structure distinction made in the rest of this paper.

Figure 3. Classification of Governance Structures in the Architectural Services Industry

External force is based on	Specific relations	<i>The Socially Constructed Network</i>
	General relations	<i>The Socially Constructed Market</i>

The *Socially Constructed Network* is the governance structure that one finds in situations where specific relationships, based on e.g. attraction, dependence, trust and/or social ties (see e.g. Hadjikhani, 1996; Hallén, 1992; Havila and Wilkinson, 1997) prevail. On the other hand, the *Socially Constructed Market* functions in situations when relationships between cooperation

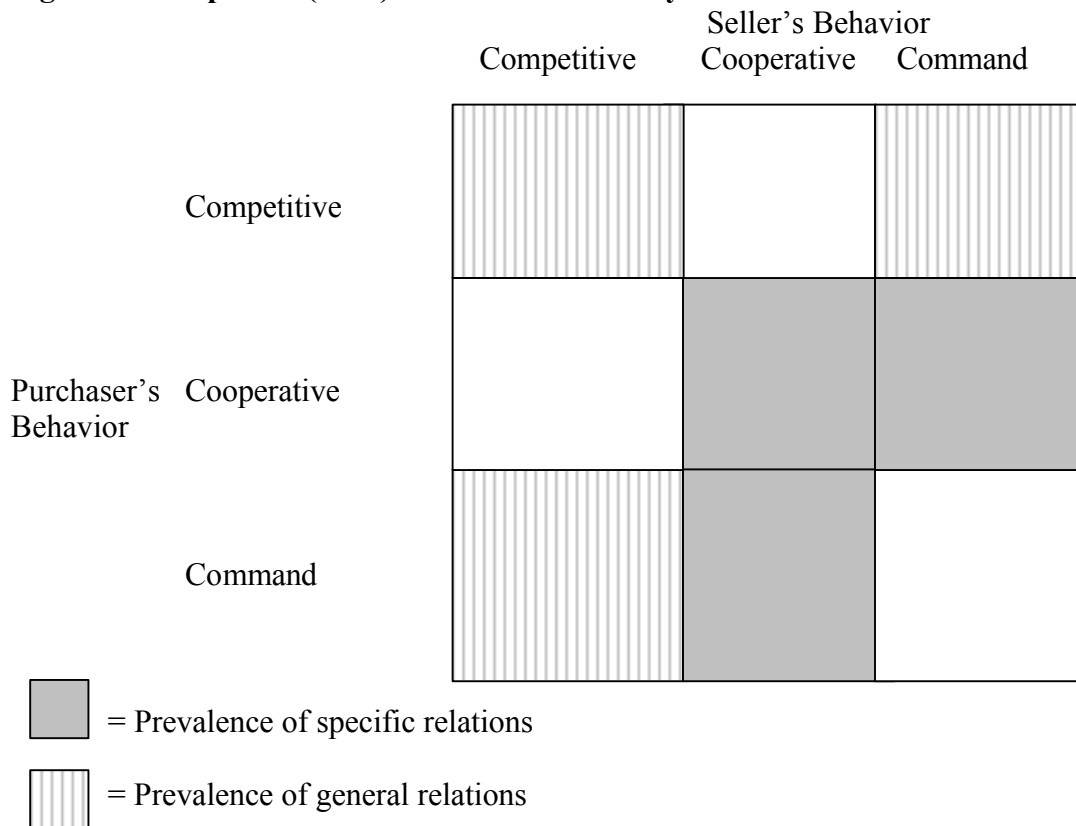
partners are generally limited to individual projects due to the e.g. discontinuous nature of the business.

The implications of the two possible governance structure for firms, regardless of whether they normally operate in situations of discontinuity, is that these either find themselves in socially constructed networks where general relations predominate or in socially constructed markets where specific relations prevail. This is, however, not to say that the governance structure determines the nature of all relations, as the preeminent actor bonds may be used to change specific relations. For example, a firm whose services or product sales are marked by discontinuity may find itself in a governance structure that is not in accordance with its preferences. In this situation its actors can suggest an alternative cooperation form to its counterpart or force an alternative on its counterpart, if the firm has sufficient power to do so. At the same time, however, the counterpart's opinion of this matter will still to some extent be formed by the general normative preferences of firms on the market, which in turn are influenced by the governance structure. Due to this possible variation of individual relationships within governance structures, it is pertinent to also examine the diversity of possible relationship types in situations of discontinuity.

Possible Relationship Types

Campbell (1985) has conceptualized that both buying and selling firms can exhibit competitive, cooperative, or commanding behavior in their purchasing and selling actions towards their counterpart. Command requires a position of strength, whereas cooperation and competition are choices that may be used by both powerful and powerless firms. Furthermore, in situations in which the seller, the buyer, or both prefer competitive behavior, the arms-length general relations common to a market governance structure prevail; in other situations, one finds relationship types common to the network governance structure. On the basis of these distinctions, Campbell (1985) has identified six types of buyer-seller relationships, as depicted in Figure 4:

Figure 4. Campbell's (1985) Classification of Buyer-Seller Behavior.



In a *perfect market* situation buyers and sellers compete for orders, and no party uses unilateral power to dictate terms of the transaction to the other. In the *buyer's* or *seller's market* case, competition is also found, yet here one party uses its option of dictating the terms of the individual transactions. In the *domesticated market*, on the other hand, long-term relationships prevail; these are marked by mutual cooperation without coercion. The *captive* and *subcontract market* are the corresponding long-term relationship situations with power imbalances, where the party with more power utilizes this advantage to dictate the terms of the relationship.

However, contrary to Campbell's (1985) model, Andersen (1999) has suggested that following a cooperative strategy toward a competitive-oriented large private sector customer is not necessarily a mismatch. Despite the initial conflicting behavior patterns and preferences, this strategy might in rare instances lead to the customer changing to a more cooperative behavioral pattern, if sufficient trust, attraction, and social bonds are created (*ibid.*). Using the terminology of Andersen (*ibid.*), this relationship pattern will be called the "Foot in the Door". It is depicted in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. Possible Relationship Types including the “Foot in the Door”.

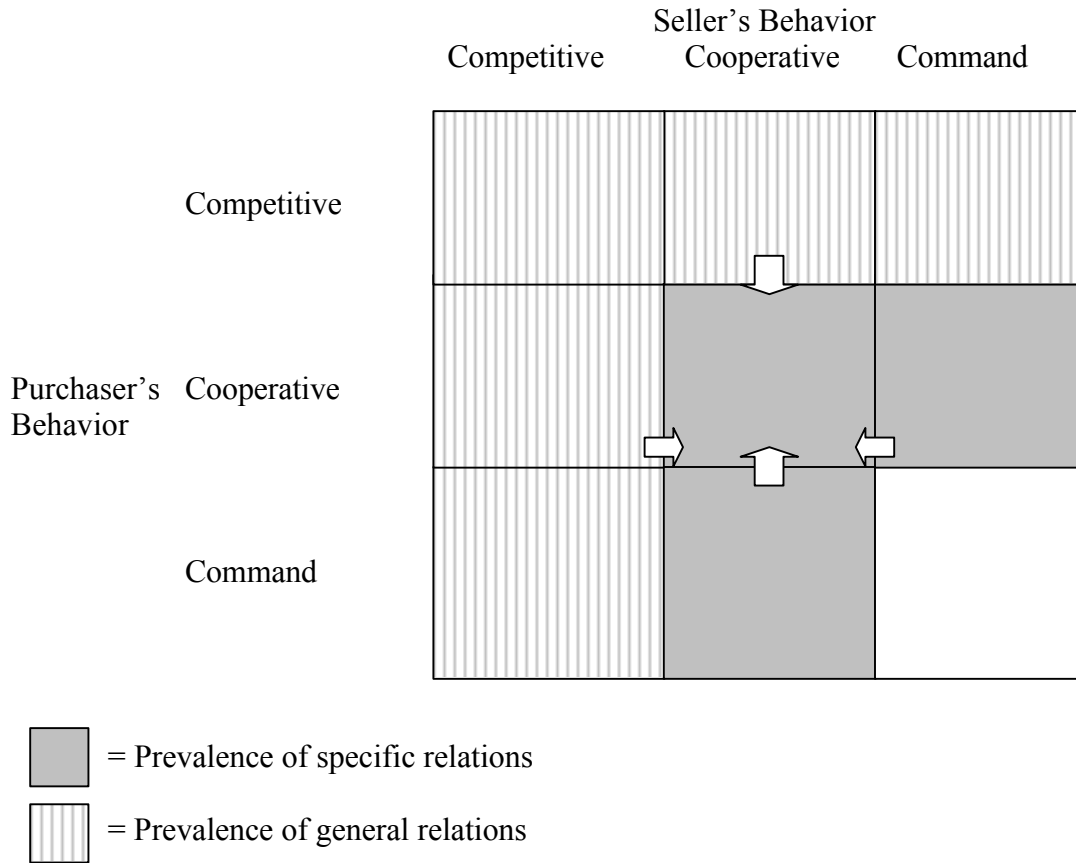


Figure 5 alters the framework of Campbell in that, following Andersen (1999), the foot in the door situation is also depicted for the situations in which the purchaser follows a competitive or command purchasing strategy and the selling firm follows a relationship-based strategy on account of its preference for increased mutuality or the repeat orders that a future steady relationship would entail. Furthermore it is hypothesized that in sellers might also perceive a need to follow a foot in the door strategy on a captive market or in the situation that the buyer follows a competitive strategy, whereas the seller has a preference for a relationship. This possibility is also depicted in Figure 5. Moreover, if the “foot in the door” tactic is successful, the relationship will move to one of domesticated interdependence. This is indicated by the four arrows in the same figure. To link the above statements with Figure 2, in the case where a firm attains a mutually cooperative relationship by following a foot in the door strategy, the changes in perception on the part of the previously competition- or control-oriented cooperation partner are the fundamental cause for the change. They lead to changes in actor bonds and, consequently, to e.g. increased trust and commitment as well as increased social and informational activity in e.g. situations of discontinuity.

With regard to each of the specific relationship types in Figures 4 and 5, in discontinuous situations where general relations prevail, one would expect to find only weak commitment,

trust, and social bonds as well as short-term attraction, although one part might be unilaterally working to increase these aspects of actor bonds by following a foot in the door strategy. In the command-cooperative cases of the captive market and the subcontract market, stronger commitment, trust, and social bonds would be expected, if the party in power allowed for this, and attraction might be more long-term, despite the discontinuity of business.²⁷¹ Moreover, if the party following the cooperative strategy was trying to get a foot in the door, one would once again see some unilateral action to increase commitment, trust, social bonds, and long-term attraction in the command-cooperative relationship. Finally, in the domesticated relationships, commitment, trust, social bonds, and long-term attraction would be found.

Towards an Increased Understanding of the Relationship Between the Environment and the Generation of Trust, Attraction, and the Social in Discontinuous Relationships

Until now, the analysis of this paper has shown that relationship types may vary substantially in situations of discontinuous demand, as it cannot be a priori deduced which governance structures and relationship types will predominate. It has also been argued that the strength of social bonds, trust, commitment, and attraction will vary with relationship and governance structure type. Finally, as the contribution of the foot in the door strategies (Andersen, 1999) suggests, it may be possible for actors in firms to influence relationship types not only through their offerings of products and services but also through trust, commitment, social bonding, and by suggesting potential resource ties and activity links.

There is consequently a need for incorporation of perspectives that focus upon the interplay between actors' actions and the environment, to determine how features of the environment in which the actor bonds are embedded (see Halinen and Törnroos, 1998) influence actor bonds in situations of discontinuity and vice versa. As the structural features common to business networks (i.e. resource ties and activity links) may not be present in situations of discontinuity, the focus must here be upon the norms for and processes of the generation of trust, attraction, and the realm of social bonds and their possible relationship *structuration* effects (see Giddens, 1984).

In their article on embeddedness in business networks, Halinen and Törnroos (1998) briefly mention the field of the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (1979, 1983, 1990) and institutional theory (e.g. DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Melin, 1989; Scott, 1995). The field is characterized by a common meaning system and a group of actors who "interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than actors outside of the field" (Scott, 1994). Additionally, due to the inherent duality of structures (Giddens, 1984), it functions both as "playground or social setting" for the included actors and as a "social base for creating distinction" among the actors (Halinen and Törnroos, 1998). The field is supported by a set of social institutions, individuals, and discourses of interpretation, as in the case of e.g. the field of the production of literature (Bourdieu, 1979).

Within a given field there are power struggles, due to actors' desire to create distinction. Actors struggle to possess as large a portion of the qualities that other actors in the field view as

²⁷¹ These expectations are presented on the basis of deductive reasoning. It would, however, be highly relevant to test them empirically in e.g. a quantitative survey of relationships in situations of discontinuity similar to the work undertaken by Thompson and Thompson, 1999.

desirable as possible. Additionally, on a more long-term perspective, actors struggle to change the consensus about what is viewed as desirable, i.e. the rules of the “playground or social setting” to their own advantage (*ibid.*; Melin, 1989). For the specific case of commerce-related fields, Melin has developed an “industrial field-of-force” concept and has compared it to IMP network approaches to marketing in the following way:

“The industrial field-of-force represents the context in which an individual industrial firm operates and of which it is an integral part. The relevant arena for each industrial firm is its industrial and societal context [...]. The commercial core of the field is the interorganizational set of industrial firms (the “company net” discussed by Hägg and Johanson, 1982), held together by cooperation through social interaction and mutual exchange of resources between different parties as well as by hostility between different parties concerning the capacity to establish exchange relations. [...] The industrial field also comprises different forces outside the proper company network, affecting the structure of the field as a whole through influence on the relative freedom of action of the individual firms within the field. The structure of the field can be described by the existing pattern of relations between all the different actors in a specific industrial field.

The field-of-force concept, taken in the sense that different forces are in action, highlights the fact that changes, both in the whole structure of the field and in the strategy and internal structure of the individual company, are results of ongoing “political” processes, controlled by different power groups. The effects on an individual company are governed by both external and internal “organized interests” [...]. The field-of-force perspective promotes the view of external and internal power relations as part of an integrated power structure [...]. One of the fundamental characteristics of the industrial field is the relative position of the organizations making up the field. The relative position expresses the basic possibilities of locomotion within the field [...]. What happens within an industrial field depends on the distribution and strength of the different forces throughout the field.

Within each social cluster (or network) one important characteristic is personal trust; each actor is accountable. The actors in one cluster are trustworthy players in the game being played; they accept the same moral and transactional rules. When an actor enters a new social cluster/network, he makes moral and instrumental investments. [...] The moral dimension expresses shared values and norms. The transaction dimension expresses interest for desired resources in the cluster/network.”

From the above definition it is clear that the industrial field-of-force combines structural features, which have been the focus of much IMP research (see e.g. Möller, 1994; Andersen, 1995; Holmlund and Törnroos, 1997), and mental representations of actors, which have been under-researched from the industrial marketing perspective (Andersen, 1995; Holmen and Pedersen, 1999; Möller, 1994). Moreover, the field is also applicable in situations when the key structural features such as activity links and resource ties are not present.

For the more specific case of project marketing, Cova, Mazet, and Salle (1996) have developed a similar concept, which also bridges this research gap: the milieu. They define the milieu as a “socio-spatial configuration that can be characterized by four elements” (*ibid.*):

- a territory
- a network of heterogeneous actors related to each other within this territory
- a representation constructed and shared by these actors
- a set of rules and norms (“the law of the milieu”) regulating the interactions between these actors.”

Cova *et al.* (*ibid.*) contrast the milieu to the network of previous IMP research in the following way:

“What distinguishes the milieu from a simple localized network of industrial actors is its collective linkage to the territory developed by practices of all types [...]. The actors share, both in their life and in their imagination, the community of some elementary structures. In this approach, the territory is no longer considered as a simple support of localisation factors but more and more as a group of territorial agents and economic, socio-cultural, political, and institutional elements having specific organisation and regulation patterns [...], shared rules and norms. This territory is characterized as global as it “not only integrates companies, but also the population, the workers, the various organizations as well as multiple social and cultural dimensions.”

From the above quotation, it can be seen that the milieu concept strongly resembles the field in its inclusion of interpretive, structuring factors that are related to e.g. trust, attraction, and social bonds.²⁷² On the other hand, the milieu differs from the field in the a priori assumption of a collective linkage to a (local or regional) territory²⁷³ as well as less focus upon long-term struggles to change actors’ consensus about the desirable representation²⁷⁴. In the following, however, the term “milieu” will be used to refer to both the (related) field and milieu concepts because (a) the two terms are almost synonymous and (b) the “milieu” was conceptualized by researchers affiliated with the IMP approach to business-to-business marketing.

In relation to understanding the nature of actor bonds in specific situations of discontinuity, studying the rules, practices, interpretations, and conventions of the milieu is a significant first step; it provides more information about the general patterns of relationships than the governance structure distinction of “socially constructed markets” versus “socially constructed network” (Skaates, 2000). Indeed, studying these rules, practices, interpretations, and conventions may help researchers and practitioners alike in finding factors that may influence actors’ preferences for e.g. “competitive”, “cooperative”, and “command” strategies (Campbell, 1985) in specific contexts of discontinuity, e.g. in the “Foot in the Door” situation (Andersen, 1999). Studies of e.g. business relationship norms in different cultures or groups (e.g. in Harris and Dibben, 1999; Johanson, Polsa, and Törnroos, 1999; Tuusjärvi, 1999) are further examples of specific contextual situations.

²⁷² The constitutional order (Araujo and Brito, 1997; Child and Smith, 1987; Herringel, 1994; Sabel, 1993 and 1997) is a third related concept. It refers to “background systems of social and political rules for engaging in specific practices, adjudicating disputes, and defining identities of constituent firms and the system in relation to the wider society” (Araujo and Brito, 1997:23). However, like the milieu as defined above, constitutional order theory does not emphasize the means by which actors or groups of actions may change the existing constitutional order.

²⁷³ Tikkanen (1998) has challenged the validity of this assumption.

²⁷⁴ Subsequent research by the authors of the milieu concept has, however, allowed for this dynamic aspect through the creation of local systems of meaning. See e.g. Cova and Hoskins (1997) and Cova, Salle, and Vincent (1999).

However, to reach an understanding of the nature of actor bonds it may not be enough to merely study these rules, practices, interpretations, and conventions from a static perspective. For although actors reproduce the structuring norms of a milieu in their efforts to convince other milieu actors of their attractiveness, trustworthiness, and commitment (see e.g. Giddens, 1984), they also seek to change the rules, practices, interpretations, and conventions to their favor by acting on the basis of their reflections of their particular situation (*ibid.*). This change can be aimed at all relationships/actor bonds in the milieu (e.g. in Bourdieu, 1996, 1986, 1979, see also Freitag, Bleicher, and Schöne, 1997; Nummila, 1999) or specific, “local” relationships/actor bonds within the milieu (Cova and Hoskins, 1997; Cova, Salle, Vincent, 1999; Kavanagh and Kelly, 1999). Thus we need a framework that connects actor bond-related features to the environment, yet also accommodates for both the convincing activities of actors, which reproduce the structural features of the environment, as well as the reflexive activities to change the environment or parts of it. In the next section, the framework of social, cultural, and symbolic capital of Bourdieu (1996, 1990, 1986, 1983, 1979) will be proposed and discussed.

Using Social, Cultural, and Symbolic Capital to Conceptualize the Dynamics of Trust, Attraction, Commitment, and Social Bonds

According to Araujo and Easton (1998), the concept of social capital (as well as related terms such as cultural, human, or symbolic capital) relies “on a metaphorical mapping of features associated with economic notions of capital or assets into the social domain”. Furthermore, each social theorist defines these terms differently (*ibid.*, compare e.g. Bourdieu, 1983 and Coleman, 1990), yet the capital types are regarded by all as resources that can, under certain circumstances, be converted into other types of capital (Araujo and Easton, 1998). Due to these differences, this paper will draw exclusively on the capital framework of Bourdieu.

In Bourdieu theory (see Bourdieu, 1979 or 1986), the struggle to accumulate capital takes place within the “field” (here referred to as the “milieu”), as previously defined in this paper. Furthermore Bourdieu operates with four types of capital: economic, symbolic, cultural, and social capital. His economic capital corresponds to both the layperson’s and most economists’ understanding of the term, i.e. money owned, used, and accumulated by a person or legal entity (see e.g. the Merriam Webster internet dictionary), whereas symbolic capital refers to the power accumulated and used in the *dynamic* struggle between and among groups and individuals to define the norms and representations of the field (*ibid.*).

Cultural capital, in turn, refers to value of the *more static* practices and physical artifacts that are the result of individuals’ socialization within one of many groups within society and this group’s efforts to distinguish itself from other groups (*ibid.*: 243-8). Cultural capital manifests itself in three forms (*ibid.*: 243):

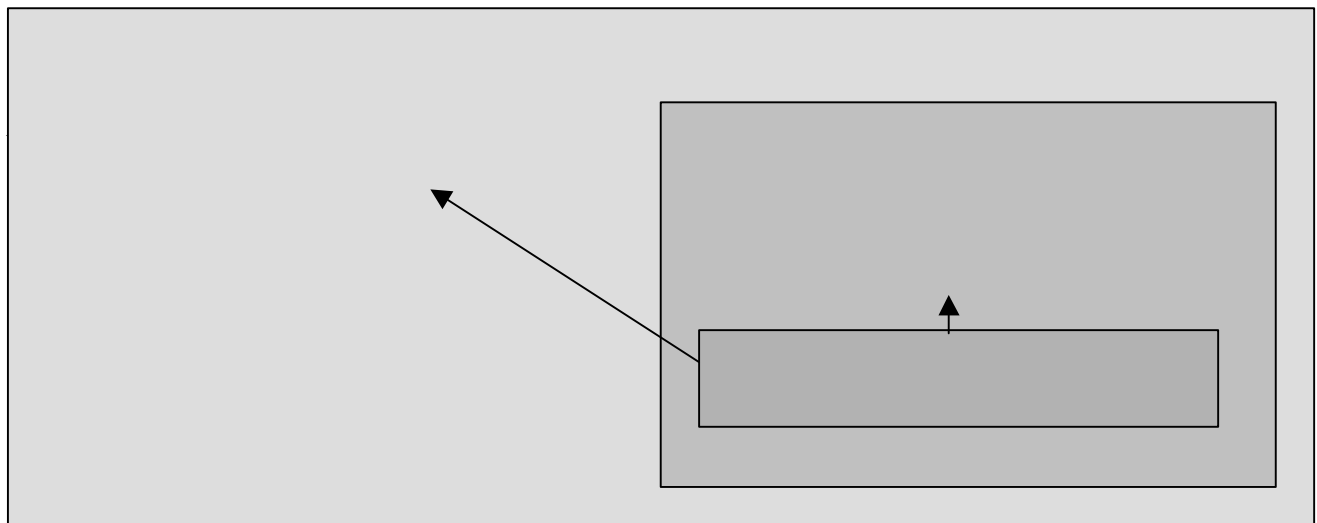
“in the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the *institutionalized* state, [... e.g. in the form of] educational qualifications.”

It should be noted that Bourdieu does not use the term “human capital” (*ibid.*:244). In his terminology, that which other sociologists term “human capital” (see e.g. Araujo and Easton, 1998; Coleman, 1988) is a part of cultural and social capital. However, as for social capital, Bourdieu states the following (1983:248-9):

“social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges. Being based on indissolubly material and symbolic exchanges, the establishment and maintenance of which presuppose reacknowledgement of proximity, they are also partially irreducible to objective relations of proximity in physical (geographical) space or even in economic and social space.”

On the basis of the above, the relationship between a given milieu and its social, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital are depicted in Figure 6 below:

Figure 6. A Milieu and Bourdieu’s Capital Concepts (based on Bourdieu, 1979, 1986).



In Figure 6, the twin, interlocked functions of the milieu as (a) a “playground or social setting” and (b) a “social base for creating distinction” (Halinen and Törnroos, 1998:191) are separated. Symbolic, cultural, social, and economic capital are all used with regard to function (b), creating distinction. When one makes use of one’s cultural, social, and economic capital, one is playing by the existing rules which have been developed during the history of the particular milieu. In contrast, one changes these rules with symbolic capital, thus affecting the *contextual framework*

of the milieu but not usually abolishing or endangering the milieu itself (see Bourdieu, 1986 and 1990; Giddens, 1984).

Bourdieu's (1983) capital framework as presented above may prove a helpful point of departure for understanding the dynamics of trust, attraction, commitment, and social and informational interactions in actor bonds characterized by situations of discontinuity. However extreme caution must be taken, as the framework as a whole is impossible to verify or falsify. Furthermore, as Bourdieu (1983:248-9, see above) is rather unclear about the logic of the accumulation and uses of the types of capital (see also Araujo and Easton, 1998), and as this logic may vary from milieu to milieu and/or actor bond to actor bond, the task of using this framework to describe the dynamics of actor bonds involves creating research definitions of trust, attraction, commitment, and other bond characteristics as well as operationalizational measures of these constructs²⁷⁵. Moreover causality and/or teleology (see Jansson, Saqib, and Sharma, 1990 for IMP discussion of the difference between causal and teleological explanations) must be established between these constructs and the capital accumulation framework for the specific milieu in question. Here, also from a critical realist perspective²⁷⁶, using case study methodology (see Easton, 1995) is a good option, due to the embedded nature and the unclear boundaries of the phenomenon (see e.g. Maaløe, 1996 or Yin, 1994)²⁷⁷.

Further problems in incorporating the capital framework within the IMP perspective arise from the fact that all of Bourdieu's types of capitals are resources as well as the by-products of previous activities (see Araujo and Easton, 1998; Bourdieu, 1996, 1990, 1986, 1983, 1979), yet they are not necessarily resources as understood by IMP scholars (see e.g. Freiling, 1997; Holmen and Pedersen, 1999; Håkansson and Johanson, 1984). Additionally, the social activities which result in the generation of social, cultural, and symbolic capital are not necessarily the sort of activities encompassed by the A-R-A model and other IMP conceptualizations of activities (see e.g. Dubois, 1998; Holmen and Pedersen, 1998; Håkansson, 1987; Håkansson and Johanson, 1993; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Johanson and Mattsson, 1992). There is thus a need for another, perhaps non-A-R-A, theoretical framework that takes the discontinuous social, cultural, and symbolic capital generating activities and their resulting resources into account, also in relation to the nature of actor bonds.

²⁷⁵ For recent previous IMP efforts concerning the definition and operationalization of these concepts, see e.g. Baldauf and Cravens, 1999; Brugha, 1999; Harris and Dibbin, 1999; from a game theoretical perspective Akkrot, Dufrenot, Maillard, and Roure, 1999, for the case of construction projects Thompson and Thompson, 1999, and for the specific case of temporary organizations Heumer, 1996 and Ratcheva and Vyakarnam, 1999. The game theoretical perspective is closer to Coleman's (1990) understanding of social capital than to the Bourdivan understanding of the term.

²⁷⁶ Here it should be noted, as Easton (1992) so eloquently states, that "the social constructivists and critical realists are much closer than their rhetoric would allow. The critical realist would argue that there is a reality but that it may be ultimately impossible to know what it is. Thus disagreements about its nature are not due to its nonexistence but to problems of discovery. Alternatively, the social constructivist might say that such disagreements are inevitable, since there is no reality. However, since the success of human activity depends upon the creation of an agreed-upon reality, then it is only too plausible that something resembling reality would be apparent in our social world."

²⁷⁷ This has been attempted in one initial study, namely Skaates, 2000.

Summary and Suggestions for Further Research

In this exploratory paper, variations in actor bonds and relationship types in situations of discontinuity were examined. It was argued that in these situations, the market governance structure is not given beforehand. It will either be the “socially constructed market”, where general relationships predominate, or “the socially constructed network”. Furthermore it was demonstrated that the concept of the milieu (Cova, Mazet, and Salle, 1996) and sociological and institutional theory concept of the field have the power to capture key environmental features that both influence actor bonds and are influenced by these bonds in either governance structure. Finally it was stated that the social, cultural, and capital concept of Bourdieu (1996, 1990, 1986, 1983, 1979) may prove useful to examining the dynamic aspects of trust, commitment, attraction and social and informational exchange in actor bonds in situations of discontinuity, although operationalizing Bourdieu’s framework for this purpose is a formidable task.

To illustrate the focus of this paper in a different way, Håkansson and Snehota’s (1995) framework for the analysis of development effects in business relationships with activity links and resource ties is depicted in Figure 7. Figure 8 has been constructed on the basis of Figure 7 for the purpose of comparison; it contains the author’s proposal of the corresponding units of analysis in situations of discontinuity. The factors that are marked by *italics* in Figure 8 are those that are especially relevant when analyzing actor bonds in situations of discontinuous business activities. Furthermore, the terms “capital-related activity links” and “capital-related resource ties” refer to the activities related to the generation of social, cultural, and symbolic capital and the resources social, cultural, and symbolic capital, respectively.

Figure 7. Håkansson and Snehota’s (1995) Framework of Analysis of Development Effects of Business Relationships with Activity Links and Resource Ties

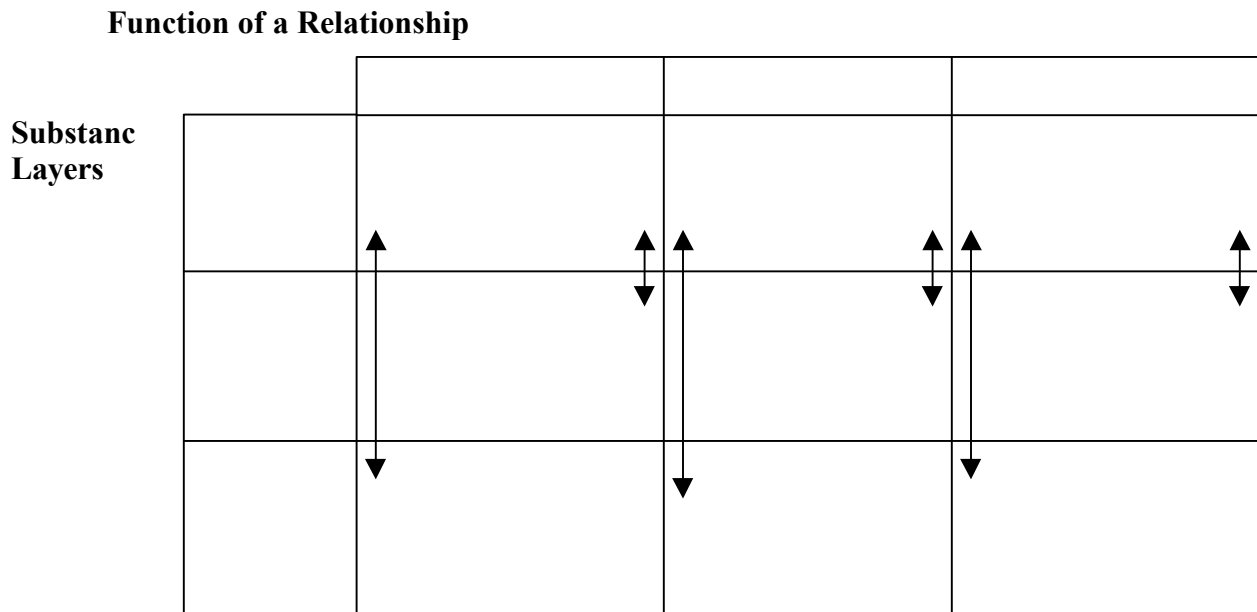
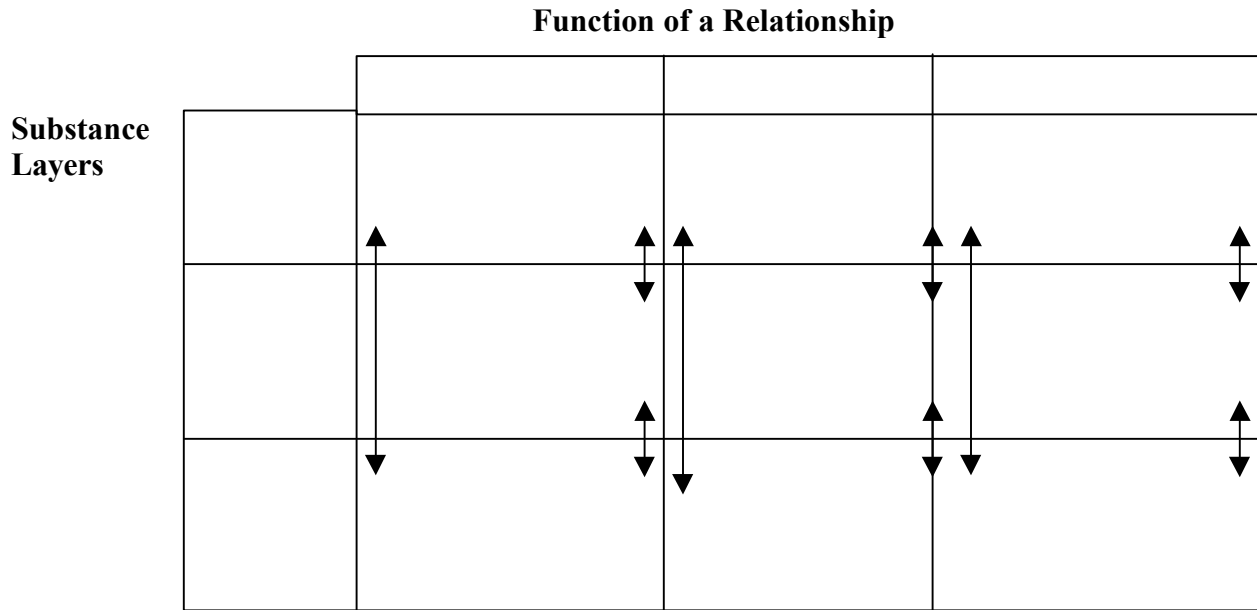


Figure 8. Framework for Analysis of Development Effects in Discontinuous Business Relationships (adaptation of Håkansson and Snehota, 1995)



Further research should focus upon experimenting with the capital framework in practice, to achieve a preliminary understanding of the mechanisms of trust, commitment, attraction, and un-/bonding on one hand in relation to specific milieus and the capital framework on the other in situations of discontinuity. Thereafter the step of constructing a model to depict connections between (a) the activities related to the generation of social, cultural, and symbolic capital, (b) the capital resources themselves, and (c) the nature of actor bonds should be undertaken. Finally yet concurrently, key issues related to the milieu concept need to be addressed. These include the following: When and to what extent can a field or milieu be defined in territorial terms (cf. Tikkanen, 1998)? When is it relevant to look at relationship marketing efforts on the basis of fixed interpretive frameworks in the milieu (thus making the concepts of social and cultural capital the object of the focus)? And when, conversely, should struggles in the milieu mandate the use of a dynamic interpretation of the milieu concept (meaning that the symbolic capital is the key concept)?

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