# FOCAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF PROJECT MARKETING
## A Literature Review with Suggestions for Practitioners and Future Research

*Maria Anne Skaates,*
*Henrikki Tikkanen,*
*University of Oulu*
*P.O. Box 4600*
*SF - 90401 Oulu*
*Finland*
*e-mail: maria.anne.skaates@oulu.fi*
*henrikki.tikkanen@oulu.fi*

## Abstract
Project marketing is an important mode of business-to-business marketing today. This paper assesses recent project marketing contributions, including predominantly those of members of the (mainly European) International Network for Project Marketing and Systems Selling (INPM). The emphasis of the review is upon the connection between focal relationships and the wider environment in which project marketing and systems selling takes place. First, several common definitions of projects and project marketing are presented and discussed. Second, the implications of three specific features of project business - discontinuity, uniqueness, and complexity – for the focal relationship and the broader marketing environment are considered at the level of multiple projects. Third, three overlapping types of postures that project-selling firms can adopt in relation to their focal relationships and the environment are identified and assessed. Finally, some avenues for further studies as well as suggestions for managers are proposed.

## 1. INTRODUCTION
Project operations is one of the dominating modes of international business in the contemporary business environment. Today most "products" of international companies increasingly exhibit project-like features (Grönroos, 1997; Günter and Bonaccorsi, 1996; Hadjikhani, 1996; cf. Tikkanen, 1997). Thus, it is not surprising that projects, project management, and project marketing have recently received a lot of attention (see e.g. the project management special issue of SJM, 1995 as well the project marketing and systems selling issue of IBR, 1996). There is also an issue-based research group called the International Network for Project Marketing and System Selling or INPM (Günter and Bonaccorsi 1996, Cova and Ghauri 1996), which is loosely affiliated to the IMP (International/Industrial Marketing and Purchasing) community of researchers. Most of its members are based in Europe.

This paper reviews recent INPM and non-INPM project marketing contributions concerning relationships and the environment of projects. First, projects and project marketing are defined, both in general terms and as they are understood by INPM group members. Second, the implications of the three specific features of projects - discontinuity, uniqueness, and complexity – for the focal relationship in its interaction with the broader marketing environment or milieu (Cova *et al.*, 1996) are considered at the level of the marketing of multiple projects. Third, three postures or ways of dealing in relationships or with the broader marketing environment are identified and assessed. These are the deterministic, constructivist, and control postures (Cova and Hoskins, 1997; Bonaccorsi, Pammoli, and Tani, 1996). Finally, suggestions for managers and for further scholarly studies are proposed.

## 2. PROJECTS AND PROJECT MARKETING

There are many similar definitions of the term *project*; however, in the project marketing literature, as opposed to the project management literature, where one also finds projects within one firm, projects always involve purchasing and selling organizations. Moreover, project operations are classified by Luostarinen and Welch (1990) under the broad heading of contract operations (other contractual operation forms being licensing, franchising, management contracts and international subcontracting). Project operations are furthermore subdivided into *partial projects, turnkey projects* and *turnkey plus projects*. Partial projects include partial system deliveries such as the delivery of a waste disposal system to a factory in construction. In a turnkey project, a complete system is delivered to the buyer. Turnkey plus projects are complete system deliveries involving additional services such as personnel or management training (Luostarinen and Welch 1990, cf. e.g. Choudhury 1988).

On a more general level, a project refers to "*a transaction concerning a functioning whole which is delivered to the buyer*" (Holstius 1987:21). Following Cova and Ghauri (1996:2), a project is "a *complex* transaction covering a *discrete package* of products, services and other actions designed to *create* (capital) *assets* for the buyer *over a certain period of time"* (emphasis added); this definition will be used in this paper. Systems selling, i.e. the sale of a complex combination of products and services offered by a company in an industrial market (see e.g. Kosonen 1991), often appears to be synonymous with the delivery of projects (cf. Günter and Bonaccorsi 1996). However, while a project can most often be considered as system[278], a system does not have to be supplied as a project, i.e. in a sequential or processual manner.

In relation to the distinction between project marketing and project management, the INPM argument for studying project marketing rests on the assertion that it is not enough to regard a project delivered by one firm/a group of firms to another organization/group of organizations as a set of managerial actions taken by the suppler(s), i.e. as mere "project management". Instead the delivery process entails the management of individual project supply processes within multi-firm "project networks". Consequently relationships between actors in the buying and selling firms are important before, during, and after and delivery process (cf. Hadjikhani, 1996). Thus from an INPM perspective, project marketing is the broader term; it always implicitly includes project management but not *vice versa*.

[278] One possible exception is industrial service partial projects, e.g. the supply of design, planning, and/or engineering services.

Furthermore, similarly to the members of the IMP group, INPM researchers emphasize that the development of relationships has an overall effect on a firm's project business. Building on this viewpoint, Alajoutsijärvi (1996) states that there are two "nested" levels of relationship management in the marketing of industrial projects. The first level is that of managing networks and relationships related to individual projects from beginning to end. The second level is "the level of multiple projects"; it encompasses relationships during a (longer) period of multiple project activity, including possible periods in which there are no projects.

Finally, regard to both levels of relationship management, the relationships in questions are embedded in environmental phenomena such as norms, institutions, economic trends, and/or networks (Håkansson, 1982). It is this embeddedness of relationships at the level of multiple projects that is the object of focus in this paper.

## 3. KEY CONCEPTS OF PROJECT BUSINESS

As all IMP researchers emphasize the role of relationships in business-to-business marketing, INPM scholars have perceived a need for a conceptual framework which depicts unique relationship-related features of project marketing and systems selling as opposed to other types of business-to-business marketing. This has resulted in the D-U-C framework (see e.g. Cova and Ghauri, 1996; Mandják and Veres, 1998; and Tikkanen, 1998), which is a list of three key distinguishing features of project marketing:

D. The *discontinuity* of demand for projects;
U. The *uniqueness* of each project in technical, financial and socio-political terms;
C. The *complexity* of each individual project in terms of the number of actors involved throughout the supply process.

The implication of discontinuity on relationships at the level of multiple project activity may be a lack of bonding, long-term mutual dependence, and mutual orientation beyond the single project, although there is substantial relationship interaction during the delivery of the individual project in questions. However, this is not always the case; after the completion of a project, a "sleeping relationship" phase may start (Hadjikhani, 1996). This refers to e.g. cases of continued buyer-seller dependence or trust after completion of the project itself due to i.e. the possible future need for improvements or replacement parts with regard to the project or the buyer firm-specific knowledge that the selling firm possess (*ibid.*:332-333):
"During sleeping relationships, contacts based on e.g. technology-based, financial, and social relationships were used on an off-and-on basis. These contacts were based on trust, and trust was a significant factor in the sense that it in effect influenced buyer behavior with regard to ordering new projects. In the sample of case study firms studies, in cases where the level of buyer trust of the sleeping relationship was high, there were incidents where buyer chose the seller to produce new projects. "

Relationships are thus sometimes maintained by off-and-on social and informational exchange during the discontinuity phase, although this exchange does not always result in new projects for the selling firm (*ibid.*). For their part, the uniqueness and complexity characteristics of the D-U-

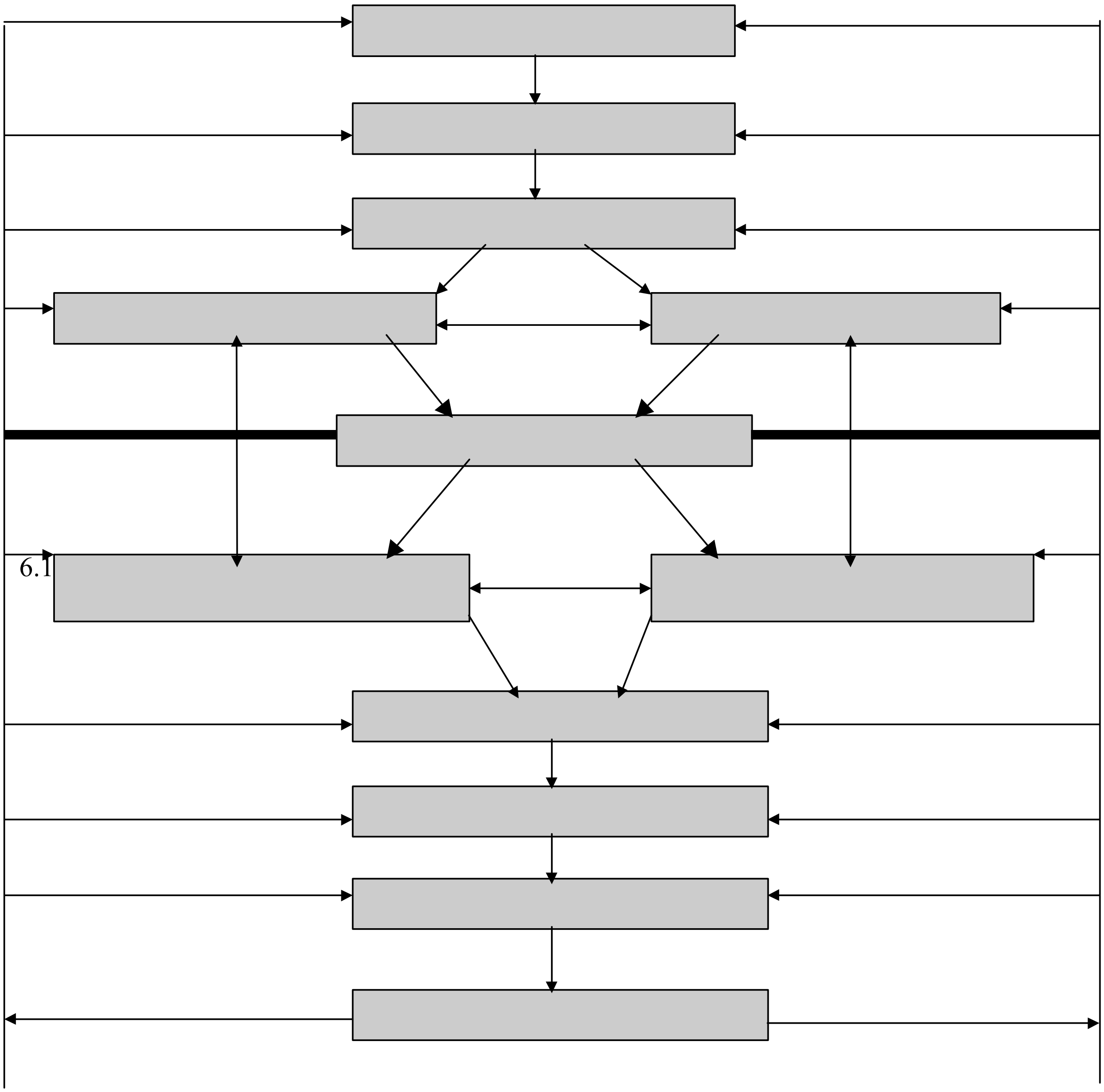
C framework may furthermore imply that different actor firm constellations or actors from a given firm are used in each individual project. This, in turn, also affects the discontinuous aspects of relationships (see e.g. Cova and Ghauri, 1996; Mandják and Veres, 1998; and Tikkanen, 1998).

Thus, as Hadjikhani (1996, see also Cova and Ghauri 1996) indicates, overcoming the demand-related discontinuity (i.e. the "D" characteristic of the D-U-C framework) in the business relationship between project buyers and sellers is the major strategic problem in project marketing seen from a relationship perspective. Therefore several recent INPM studies have focused upon discontinuity at the level of multiple projects (Alajoutsijärvi, 1996; Cova and Salle, 1997; Hadjikhani, 1996; Lange and More, 1995; Skaates, 2000; Tikkanen, 1998). In these studies, each individual project is regarded as an episode in a given buyer-supplier relationship (Hadjikhani, 1996, compare also to the in the basic IMP interaction model, Håkansson, 1982). These studies also demonstrate that the success or failure of individual projects will often effect the long-term development of buyer-seller relationships[279]. Therefore it is wise for project marketers to focus on the implications of single projects for subsequent project marketing efforts as well as to understand and develop the relevant relationships through which individual projects are planned and realized, also in the "sleeping relationship" phase (Cova *et al.*, 1996; Hadjikhani, 1996). To aid project marketers in managing relationship marketing at both the levels of the individual project and the level of multiple projects, Cova *et al.*, 1994, developed a general Marketing Configuration for Project-to-Order Supplier Firms; it is depicted in Figure 1.

Cova *et al.*'s (1994) model includes a detailed depiction of the pre-project phases or the anticipative stage, i.e. the phases above the thick line of Figure 1. During this phase, maintaining and receiving information from relationships to many potential customers or cooperation partners is the key activity. In the words of Mandják and Veres (1998: 484):

[279] One telling example is found in Alajoutsijärvi and Tikkanen 1998. The American paper machine manufacturer Beloit failed badly in two major rebuilds of the Finnish Kymmene corporation's Voikkaa paper mill during the 1950s. These two "fiascos" supplied by Beloit caused deep bitterness among mill managers and also had a strong influence on Beloit's other customer relationships in Finland because of close interaction between paper engineers in Finland. Beloit's perceived "arrogant" attitude was moreover an important reason why a relatively unexperienced Finnish manufacturer, Valmet Inc., received a subsequent paper machine order from Kymmene. The Kymmene Corporation, which runs more than a dozen paper mills in several countries, did not consider buying from Beloit before the beginning of the 1990s.

**Figure 1. Cova, Mazet, and Salle's General Marketing Configuration for Project-to-Order Supplier Firms.**




Steps 1 – 5 above and on the thick horizontal line concern marketing-related steps taken independent of a given project (the phase of the anticipation of a project).

Steps 5 – 10 on and below the thick horizontal line concern marketing and coordination efforts related to a specific project that has been awarded or is in the processes of being awarded to the project-selling firm in question (the adaptive phase).

Source: Cova *et al.*, 1994, p. 40.

"There is no concrete project in the anticipative stage, the company watches the market in order to gain information necessary for anticipating future projects. This, however, is not a passive process because the company wants to affect and initiate the future projects through the network (Cova et al. 1996, Cova-Hoskins 1997)."

This social and informational exchange is facilitated and insured in the "anticipative stage" by "network investments" (see Cova *et al.* 1993). These investments consist of social exchange to enable early project anticipation and give information to enable the creation of relevant core offers as well as social exchange to ensure that possibility of future social exchange.

When a concrete future project starts to take shape, i.e. when a firm is asked to prepare tender by a potential client or sees a public sector notification of a public tendering procedure, the second stage of preparation, i.e. the adaptive stage or the phase below the thick line of Figure 1, starts. In this phase the relationship marketing efforts become more focused upon the focal relationship to the potential customer of the project in question. Mandják and Veres (1998:484) state the following about this phase:

"The concrete project does not yet exist but the contractor starts to prepare and mobilises its network and if possible, tries to influence the buyer concerning the development of specifications of the project to be purchased (Cova et al. 1996, Cova-Hoskins 1997). This is followed by the offer stage and the project negotiation stage. The last element of the model is realisation."

After realization, the experiences of the project-selling firm are fed back to the anticipative steps and e.g. adjustments of strategic priorities or future network investment actions, e.g. in "sleeping relationships", may occur. Cova *et al.*'s (1994) model can also be easily modified to depict situations where concurrent work on two or more projects is undertaken or situations concerning of post-project supplementary delivery services (see Mandják and Veres, 1998 for further information on supplementary delivery services). In this case, the experiences from multiple projects all influence both subsequent anticipative actions and subsequent adaptations.

With regard to the environment in which the focal relationship and all other relationships are placed, INPM conceptualizations emphasize its socially constructed nature. Building on Håkansson and Johanson's (1993) market governance structure classification and Cova and Ghauri (1996), Skaates (2000) has conceptualized that project marketing firms operate on either in socially constructed markets or in socially constructed networks, as depicted in Figure 2 below:

**Figure 2. Governance Structures of Project Marketing Markets.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| External force is based on | Specific relations | |
| | General relations | |

Source: Skaates, 2000:104.

The "Social Constructed Network" is the governance structure that one finds in situations where specific relationships, based on e.g. trust or dependence (Hadjikhani, 1996) or attraction or social ties (see Bourdieu, 1996 or Skaates, 2000) predominate. In contrast, the "Socially Constructed Market" functions in situations where relations between cooperation partners are generally kept more distant due to e.g. the discontinuous nature of project demand.

Both types of governance structures are socially constructed because the inherent *complexity* of relations (i.e. the C in the D – U – C Framework) makes the difference between norms and interests less clear cut (Cova *et al.*, 1996; Skaates, 2000). This can be explained in the following manner (see *ibid.*): Due to the complexity of project the buyer will be receiving, she may not know of or be able to articulate all of her own interests (see e.g. Backhaus, 1995). However this does not make the relationship between sellers and buyers purely dependent on existing norms and laws, as achieving sales still depends on convincing the buyer that one is taking her perceived interests into account (Løwendahl, 1998). Furthermore, there will be conventions or norms that are commonly used in certain solutions, as their use reduces the complexity for all parties involved (Kadefors, 1995; Tuusjärvi, 1999).

The French project marketing researchers Cova, Mazet, and Salle's (1996a:654) project marketing "milieu" concept is applicable both in network and socially constructed market governance situations, as it captures the socially constructed nature of both situations. It is 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."

Furthermore, Cova *et al.* (*ibid.*) describe the difference between a milieu and a network 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."

The project marketing milieu, as described above, resembles the field or field-of-force of institutional theory (see e.g. DiMaggio and Powell, 1983:154; Melin, 1989:164-7; Scott, 1995: 207-8) and Bourdivan sociology (1979, 1986; for an IMP assessment of the term see Halinen and Törnroos, 1998), save for the a priori assumption of territorial linkage. Within the milieu, project marketing firms have to generate or maintain credibility[280], irregardless of whether they are operating in socially constructed markets or networks, in order to be considered serious by important others and to be made part of informational and social networks by these others (Skaates, 2000). Actors in firms do this through their networks. Sometimes the creation and maintenance of credibility is done consciously, e.g. through nurturing "sleeping relationships" or arranging ritual gatherings and official occasions (Cova and Salle, 1997; Hadjikhani, 1996); at other times the generation of credibility, like the generation of social capital, is a by-product of activities that have other primary goals (*ibid.*, Bourdieu, 1996; Coleman, 1990, Skaates, 2000).

However, as other milieu actors have many social or informational links to third actors, it is not enough for project selling firms to merely concentrate their credibility generation activities upon previous and potential customers; instead they must also include broader societal and institutional actors in their efforts (Björkman and Kock, 1995; Cova and Hoskins, 1997; Sjöberg, 1995; Tikkanen and Lindblom, 1998). The categories of potentially relevant actors having been identified and systematized by Tikkanen and Lindblom (1998), who took their point of departure in the three partly overlapping societal spheres identified by Max Weber (1972), the economic, the sociological, and the political spheres.[281] Table 1 presents Tikkanen and Lindblom's (*ibid.*) schematic categorization of actors relevant for project marketing credibility generation.

Some actors in the milieu may best be influenced directly by project selling firms, whereas other actors may be reached by e.g. indirect social capital and reputation effects (Araujo, Bowey, and Easton, 1998; Bourdieu, 1996 and 1983; Skaates, 2000). Additionally references may be used in the general influence activity - either directly by the project selling firm (Cornelsen and Diller, 1998; Salminen, 1997; Uusitalo, 1998) or indirectly by firms connected to the project selling firm, e.g. customer firms (Cornelsen and Diller, 1998).

However irregardless of the means used, there are three general *postures*[282] that a project marketing firm can adopt in its project seeking activities towards a specific firm or towards the milieu which includes all of its potential customers and cooperation partners: the deterministic and constructivist postures (Cova and Hoskins, 1997), as well as the control posture (Bonaccorsi, Pammoli, and Tani, 1996). These will be discussed in detail in the next section.

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[280] Credibility is defined by Blomqvist (1997:279) as "the actor's perceived ability [i.e. perceived by the other members of the milieu] to perform something he *claims* he can do on request".
[281] The first of these spheres has received most attention in business-to-business marketing studies, whereas research is scarce on the latter two dimensions (cf. Alajoutsijärvi and Eriksson, 1998; Sjöberg, 1995).
[282] The term posture is used in Ford, 1997:129 to refer to how a company manages a given relationship.

**Table 1. Tikkanen and Lindblom's (1998:20) Categorization of Relevant Milieu Actors**

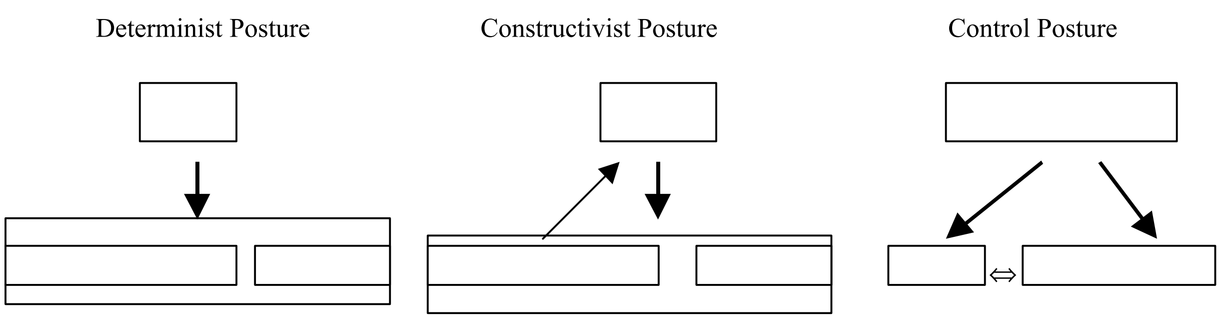
| | **Business Actors** | **Civil/Community Actors** | **Government/State Actors** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **The Level of Individuals** | Employees: managers, salespeople, specialists etc. | Citizens in their different roles: Owners, influencers, consumers etc. | Employees of governmental organizations: officials, political decision-makers, civil servants etc. |
| **The Level of Formal Intraorganizational Bodies** | Intraorganizational departments or functions, formal adhocratic bodies: Marketing departments, R&D units, project organizations etc. | Intraorganizational departments or functions, formal adhocratic bodies of non-governmental, not-for-profit organizations: Party departments and committees, board of directors of not-for-profit organizations etc. | Intraorganizational departments or functions, formal adhocratic bodies of governmental organizations: ministry departments, committees, project organizations etc. |
| **The Level of Whole Formal Organizations** | Companies and other business organizations: suppliers, buyers, competitors, consultants, other horizontal organizations etc. | Non-governmental not-for-profit organizations: Parties, the Finnish Red Cross, registered civic or environmental movements etc. | Governmental organizations: Ministries, universities, research units etc. |
| **The Level of Formal Collectives** | Formal business collectives: Diversified corporations, Formal alliances etc. | Formal civil collectives: Regional or international administration of large not-for-profit organizations, the Red Cross, labor Unions etc. | Formal governmental collectives: governments, Regional administration, the EU, ministry administration etc. |
| **The Level of Informal Collectives** | Informal cooperative nets between companies | Informal groups of all sizes and features: families, ethnic groups, social classes, political cliques etc. | Informal cooperative nets within the public sector |

## 4. POSSIBLE POSTURES OF PROJECT MARKETING FIRMS

In a seminal article, Cova and Hoskins (1997) have pointed out that project marketing firms may take in two fundamentally different approaches to project marketing in relation to the norms, rules, and representations of a given project marketing milieu. They may either anticipate, learn to comprehend, and excel in following the accepted rules and representations of the milieu (the *deterministic* posture), or they may become actively involved in shaping the rules and representations of the milieu (the *constructivist* posture). Additionally the authors indicate that project marketing firms may alternate between both approaches at different points in time when aiming to achieve one or more project orders (*ibid.*).

The third posture, the *control posture* of Bonaccorsi, Pammoli, and Tani (1996) is an extreme version of the constructivist posture. From a strategic competition perspective, which also encompasses marketing concerns, these authors suggest that for large systems or project selling companies, i.e. "those large, multi-technology, multi-business firms that are typically active in systemic industries in most industrial countries" (*ibid.*:539) it may be paramount in the long run to maintain the global control of the technological dynamics of the system. In Bonaccorsi, Pammoli and Tani's (*ibid*.) argumentation, this is due to e.g. the fact that in situations where innovation is likely to occur, the complex relationship content between the project marketing firms and other project actors cannot be given in advance. It is therefore in their opinion necessary for the project selling firm to be able to deliver and retain control of all possible combinations. Thus the control posture presupposes that project-selling firms are constantly involved in attempting to control all rules, representations, and developments in their relevant milieus to minimize their market uncertainty. The three postures are depicted in Figure 3 below:

**Figure 3. The Deterministic, Constructivist, and Control Postures**




In Figure 3, it is illustrated that the interpretations and norms of the milieu govern the actions of the project selling firm that adopts a determinist posture as well as the actions of the other firm(s) with which it is interacting at a given point in time. The constructivist posture, on the other hand, entails that the project-selling firm is manipulating with "accepted" interpretations of the milieu in order to influence the decisions of the other firm(s) to its favor. Finally, the control posture mandates the project-selling firm's constant control and manipulation with the representations and norms of the milieu and their changes across time as well as control of individual firms within the milieu.

It is our judgment that these three postures are fruitful cognitive tools for understanding possible inter-organizational interactions or, more specifically, relationships between project selling firms and its broader relevant environment, i.e. the milieu. Furthermore, these postures highligh the fact that project selling firms may in some circumstances be able to change the interpretations and norms of external others. However, at the moment we lack knowledge of (a) the process of meaning and norm construction in project marketing milieus, (b) variation of meaning and norms among different milieus, and (c) the situations in which each type of posture is most suitable.

With regard to point two, project marketing scholars Backhaus, Aufderheide, and Späth's German-language region based study (1994) indicates that in cases where a project or systems buyer has incomplete information, he usually does not commit himself to technology requiring long-term ties. However, in these same German-speaking regions, part of this risk is often regulated through contracts and the legal system, thus the management of legal contracts is prescribed by the authors (*ibid.*) to be a key part of a project marketing strategy. If this alternative is not possible, Backhaus, Aufderheide and Späth (*ibid.*) propose that the second best alternative is that the seller should work to build the trust of the buyer. Thus on the basis of this study one may presume that the use of contracts to reduce the risks associated with being locked into a specific technology may be a very common part of the interpretive and normative framework of actors in German-speaking project marketing milieus. However this does not necessarily have to be the case to the same extent in other milieus, as research indicates that the use of legalistic solutions to reduce risks varies substantially among nations (see e.g. Usunier, 1993).

To take another example, differences in the interpretation of supra- and international public tendering rules vary substantially from country to country (compare e.g Cova, Salle, and Vincent, 1999 for France; Large and More, 1995 for Canada; Skaates, 2000 for Denmark and Germany; Welch, Welch, Young, and Wilkinson, 1996 for a Chinese/World Bank Project). This is true, despite the fact that some have previously predicted a common direction in future policy (see e.g. Cova and Cova, 1990). Thus, in order to create general rules about when a certain posture is most suitable, we need more information about variations in interpretive frameworks and norms as well as better theories about the construction of common meaning in inter-organizational settings.

However at a lower level of abstraction, as far as the management of complexity in project business is concerned, the identification and development of relevant inter-actor relationships in the milieu of the focal project marketing organization is a crucial issue that also should influence the choice of posture in relation to other(s). When it comes to individual milieu actors, some may not be important for a selling firm's business and also not be influential actors in the milieu. In this case, relationships might best be managed in a relatively transactional manner with an arms-length, deterministic posture. Other actors may, on the other hand, be important with regard to several projects as well as the periods between individual project supply processes. The management of relationships to these actors would then probably need to be totally different from the management of the first type of relationships. Thus how to deal efficiently with the complexity of relevant actor structures in terms of both time and space may be identified as one of the most crucial yet difficult managerial issues in project business. Furthermore, proper longitudinal understanding of the main features of the specific milieu in question, in terms of both historical development and anticipation of the future, may be regarded as a prerequisite for any strategic decision in project marketing.

## 5. DISCUSSION OF MANAGERIAL AND SCIENTIFIC IMPLICATIONS

The IMP marketing management perspective concentrating on the development of a company's crucial exchange relationships is termed by Möller and Wilson (1995) as "*the firm as a nexus of exchange relationships*"[283]. From this perspective the first managerial objective is to tackle the structure and content of the relationships of a focal company within networks. In other words, the focal company has to identify the relationships it maintains or influences in the "sleeping relationship"/"anticipative" phase in order to conduct its project businesses. However there is a fundamental paradox with regard to this task, as project selling firms do not always find themselves in a network governance structure (Cova and Ghauri, 1996; Skaates, 2000, cf. also Håkansson and Johanson, 1993).

In IMP theory, four possible types of relationship refer to four different types of exchange that may characterize a given project marketing situation influenced by the D-U-C characteristics. These are: market transactions, short-term dyadic relationships at the individual project level, long-term relational exchange at the level of multiple projects, and the social and informational networks of relationships of the milieu (adaptation of Möller 1994). However, some project marketing relationships may contain hierarchical elements, i.e. in the case of the control posture. These hierarchical elements are not commonly covered by the IMP perspective (cf. Håkansson and Johanson, 1993). Thus it may be relevant for project marketing purposes to supplement Möller's (1994) adapted classification of exchange relationships with one that also includes hierarchical types of relationships, e.g. Webster's (1992) six categories of sport transactions, repeated transactions, long-term customer-seller relationships, customer-seller partnerships, strategic alliances, network organizations, and vertical integration. However, regardless of the chosen relationship categorization framework, the different types of relationships mandate variations in managerial attention. To take an example, as stated in the previous section, relationships characterized by short-term or transactional market exchanges related to minor contracting issues during the implementation phase of an individual project probably do not often require long-term attention on the part of the project marketer. On the other hand, long-term relationships with central financiers or customers, for example, need different, long-term oriented attention, which continues during the "sleeping" phase of the relationship between individual projects when future demand is anticipated and constructed (cf. Hadjikhani, 1996; Cova 1998). This need for attention is often overlooked by project marketers who focus only upon the management of individual projects during the delivery process and on sporadic, last moment "pell-mell" running after "promising" potential projects (cf. Mazet and Cova, 1992; Tikkanen and Lindblom 1998).

The second objective is for the project marketer to produce a longitudinal understanding of the processes or dynamic aspects of the milieu, including its discontinuous relationships. These processes concern actor representations as well as the internal and external development of the

[283] Cf. the focal firm/focal net concepts in network theory (e.g. Tikkanen 1997a, 70-72), and the core ideas of relationship marketing as a core, general "philosophy" for marketing (e.g. Gummesson et al. 1997).

activity structure and the resource constellations within the milieu. However, this is a challenging task, due to the complexity of the network of actors and their activities and resources, the relative uniqueness of individual project deliveries, as well as the previously emphasized discontinuities in exchange. Thus the deepening and widening of the a firm's understanding of its milieu may prove to be an especially challenging task for more technologically or project management oriented project suppliers (Tikkanen and Lindblom 1998).

In this case we advise firms to utilize contextual research in this endeavor. In Pettigrew's often cited terms (e.g. 1985, 1990), a project marketing researcher has to construct his or her understanding along the three dimensions of context, content and process. A profound understanding of project marketing-related structures and processes involves examining these issues within their actual environments, i.e. in the connected focal relationships (Pettigrew, 1985; Anderson *et al.,* 1994) and the entire milieu (Cova *et al.*, 1996). This milieu forms the context dimension, whereas its history forms the process dimension. Furthermore, the content dimension is linked to the project marketing-related phenomena that the project marketer wishes to understand better. As proposed by Hadjikhani (1996), a firm may focus on studying discontinuity in its project business relationships, or try to learn how successful project marketers perceive and manage their relevant connected networks, i.e. how they tackle the dilemmas of living with as well as constructing - or even controlling - their project marketing milieus.

Similarly, for researchers one main challenge is to use as intensive, focused, qualitative methods to create a more sufficient understanding of variations of the phenomena under scrutiny in their real-life contexts, based on multiple actor-informants' own constructions of their situations in the context studied (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1966). This is important because we still lack basic knowledge of how networks and central relationships develop in the manifold situations where discontinuity, uniqueness, and complexity effects are at work. More specifically, by a "sufficient understanding", we mean that the researcher is able to comprehend longitudinally the broader and complex reality of the focal relationship and its context, in order to enable future building of simple and powerful models (see e.g. Halinen and Törnroos, 1998).

Finally, from our point of view, with regard to future simple and powerful models, it would be relevant to develop theories and models about e.g. (a) how variations in project marketer's conceptualizations and study of its relevant connected milieu are related to their long-term success in international project business, (b) in what situations the milieu may be defined in geographical terms (cf. Tikkanen, 1998), and (c) the suitability and the possibility of using the deterministic, constructivist, and control postures in different situations.

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