

THE DIFFERENT ROLES OF A RAILWAY COMPANY IN AN INTERMODAL FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, there is a theoretical discussion of the role-position terms as conceptualisations. Second, an empirical testing of the appropriate roles/positions of the focal firm (railcarrier) in intermodal freight transportation is conducted.

INTRODUCTION

There has been growing interest in the network theme both among practitioners and in research. Despite the fact that in logistical analysis the infrastructural network structures have been widely elaborated, more attention has been recently paid to the *relationships* between the nodes. Conventionally, in infrastructural network models the ties are not explained as relationships but rather as concrete links. Nevertheless, it seems that the *managerial* or *strategical explanation* of networks (network as sets of nodes and links creating network-like supply chains) will be gradually replaced by contemporary views in which the theoretical underpinnings are different: there is a dawning of behavioural paradigm in logistics science compared to the conventional strategical one and its dominance (see Figure 1).

Furthermore, intermodalism (IM) or intermodal freight transportation (IFT) have been intensively contemplated by numerous scholars (see e.g. Woxenius 1994, 1998, Bukold 1993, 1996, Adjadjihoue 1995, Muller 1995, Gröhn 1998, Tuimala and Lukka 1999, Tuimala 2000, Bask *et al.* 2001, Aastrup 2003). Intermodal transportation has been conventionally defined as *movement of unitised goods with at least two different transportation modes*. This particular mode of transportation is interesting for scholars analysing interorganisational behaviour, since it is assumed that intermodalism can be viewed as a total logistics service offered by a network of different organisations. Accordingly, this form of combined transport provides a testing ground to study more exhaustively the themes and dimensions of interorganisational behaviour. There is no real intermodalism without active participation of all the parties involved and without tight relationships between the operators and facilitators. The parties can be service providers (carriers, freight forwarders, transportation companies, port operators), agents, stakeholders (e.g. towns, regional associations), customers (shippers, receivers), or others (customs, even trade unions). In this study, VR Cargo (a strategical business unit of the Finnish railway company VR Ltd.) as a *railcarrier* is the *focal firm*.

It can be assumed that with and through relationships the actors create, perform and capture roles and positions, which also stem from the network involvement. In contrast, the infrastructural networks explaining IFT are conventionally regarded as systems of nodes, links, and functions. A new perspective providing new mindsets both for the theoretical analysis and more influential business practices can be employed by addressing the tasks, roles, and expectations of the operators (multitude of various behavioural acts and episodes). Furthermore, it is assumed that an actor might have *different roles* in the network depending on whether the role appears *in a dyadic relationship* or *in the network context*.

This study has *two* primary objectives. The *first* objective is to discuss the content of the role and position terms as conceptualisations. Although role as a term could refer to network dynamics, and to incremental and radical changes in the networks, in a similar way as position refers to stability and to influences of bonded structures (see e.g. Mattsson and Johanson 1992, Anderssen *et al.* 1994, Anderson *et al.* 1998), a slightly more intricate conceptualisation will be suggested. Moreover, IFT can be also an application *area* for the network development. Vital for the analysis is also the question of how the operator is embedded in the network. The theoretical examination relies mainly on earlier suggestions (e.g. Anderson *et al.* 1998, Aastrup 2002, Aastrup 2003) attached by some new proposals.

The *second* objective is to conduct preliminary empirical research work in which the practitioners representing the focal net are asked to give their perceptions of the role of the focal firm. The sample of informants consists of VR Cargo's major partners in intermodal freight transportation. The informants account for a major part of the total revenue of the focal firm in domestic intermodal business.

The prevalence of two distinctive paradigmatic explanations in modern logistics gives some background for the analysis. It is assumed that these two paradigms (the network view as explained according to the IMP Group's suggestions and the facility network thought/Supply Chain Management/SCM) give a researcher different angles for explaining the themes of interorganisational behaviour as well as the roles and positions (see Figure 1; adjusted from Christiansen 1998, Kent and Flint 1997, Nikkanen 2000).

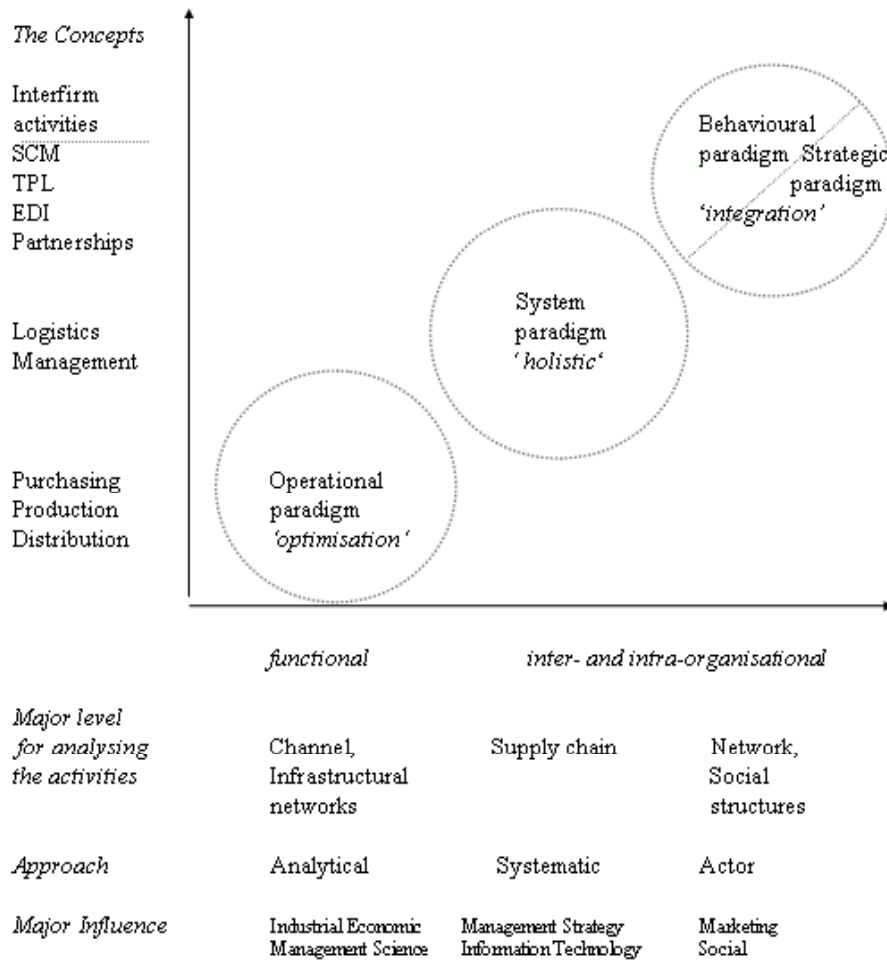


Figure 1. Relations between Recent Logistics Paradigms, Themes, Methodology, and Co-sciences

Among scientists in logistics there has recently tended to be more interest in the behavioural paradigm than the strategical one. This implies that there is also more interest in roles and positions and other behavioural aspects in interorganisational behaviour (e.g. identity, social embeddedness) instead of merely analysing the functions. From analytical point of view it is not of major importance how a system creates IFT, but how an actor is embedded in the outer reality through its presence and involvement. We also partly reject the use of simple S-R-scheme (stimulus-response simplification indicating the managerial worldview) and employ the idea of interaction, instead. Moreover, a distinction should be made between the *nets* (subentities of the network structure e.g. social, technological, or geographical) and the *network*. The convergence of these two different, partly overlapping paradigms is evident, however (for more discussion see Nikkanen 2000).

ROLE AND POSITION EXPRESSING INVOLVEMENT

Role

The terms role and position as conceptualisations are associated with the analysis expressing two opposite forces: change and stability (see e.g. Anderson *et al.* 1998). In general, the terms are coupled with network relationships having a past, present, and future. These dualistic terms have plenty of theoretical parallels. Consequently, there is an interplay with them expressing inseparability; '*they are actually different facets of the same phenomenon*' as Halinen (1994, 252) puts it.

A role can be defined as a task which is influenced by both the position of an actor in the network and how he is embedded in it, and more specifically, in nets. The role requires some plausibility in the network; it is thus important how the other members perceive a single actor through the relationships. Regarding the temporal aspect of the concept, and emphasising the presence, a role can be expressed as a duty or a purpose of an actor in a particular activity. In this sense it could be an imperative right now implying to an expected pattern of behaviour associated with an assumption or a presumption for the future. More accurately, and considering the future, one can note that a role – and more precisely a position – *includes an idea of an expectation, and intention*; e.g. Anderson *et al.* (1998, 172) use the term role '*to express (..) actor activities as (these) emanate from the creation and sense-making process that characterizes each actor's own intentions and interpretations* (comments in parenthesis added by the present author).

In this study, role as a term means a bundle of activities, and tasks performed by an actor in IM transportation, influenced by the expectations – generated through and with the help of network relationships – of what is perceived as appropriate (compare to Anderson *et al.* 1998). It is thus an appearance for the network members based strongly on behavioural responses. With the role, an actor is required to accept an adoption of tasks according to an expected pattern of behaviour, while with the position we more often refer to adaptation of tasks because of specific situations, and under different, more dynamical circumstances. Hence, an actor is ready to face a challenge of modified behaviour with respect to the role expectations. Consequently, the role is more a concept for analysing the behavioural aspects in the interaction rather than merely the expectations.

Though role is often associated with the change dimension in network studies (e.g. Anderson *et al.* 1998) we could assume that it could also refer to stability: on the basis of preliminary discussions with actors it seems that in the IM network there is a *robust tendency to accept and maintain the existing roles*. Hence, the roles are not just an outcome in a long temporal process because of stable tasks in the network, but because of structures. Bundles of bonds (e.g. social, technological, co-ordination) and bonded structures are an assurance for on-going collaboration within permanent relationships. With the help of steady roles the (pro)actors settle terms for collaboration. Moreover, it is possible to define role switching, which means that in different situations an actor might have different roles.

As regards the role of the focal firm, it should be remembered that there is still a *government-erected monopoly*, which means that the focal firm has an exclusive right to maintain railway service on domestic tracks, implying a sole operator case. Consequently,

there is an external obligation stipulated by the public authority to cope with certain transportation activities. The actor can change the position through role performance, however. On the other hand, this is possible only on a limited scope because of the network involvement e.g. role of the common carrier do not allow the focal firm to change the position radically.

In the network approach the role conceptualisation describes the dynamic aspects of the position because scholars tend to underline both the impact of social structures and the processes within (see e.g. Halinen 1994, Anderson *et al.* 1998). This is due to the fact that these suggestions stem from the role theory and behavioural sciences. However, the power of structural aspects – the strength of the actor bonds – indicate that the other actors (members in the focal net) can influence the behaviour in terms of stipulating the norms for the behaviour, which thus reduces the focal firm's ability to extend the scope of the behavioural responses. Also Havila (1996) claims that actually the role as a concept includes the dynamic aspect of network behaviour. The idea is derived from two distinctive sources: she strongly emphasises the *social structures*, and uses the term to gain some explanatory power for the investigation. The social structures are more vulnerable to apparent changes than e.g. the technological ones.

Theoretically, it is assumed that the main roles of the operators are those of *actors*, *reactors*, and *interactors*. With actor we predominantly mean proactive measures in a dyadic relationship. Considering particularly the contractual bond we could define these as principals as is often done in jurisdiction. Because an actor is deeply incorporated to its role, the principal has certain rights, and certain opportunities to interpret and judge the situations, and give specific meaning for the events. An actor can also be an initiator. Reactors are more likely to have reactive measures. In practice, they are often called as subcontractors. Hence, they are strongly tied to the counterpart with a contractual bond, and the scope of responses is limited. Furthermore, they have a clear and predicted behavioural pattern including respect responses. This is required because of the true nature of the relationship: it provides some incentives but includes depressive, harmful and even deleterious elements as well. An interactor can be an integrator: an actor combining the service packages offered by a number of modes, coordinating the activities, or consolidating single consignments. In the transportation business the common carriers are to give a neutral, non-exclusive, and non-restrictive multilateral platform for interactive service production. Hence, the number of relationships is necessarily large. The scope of behavioural activities is presumed to be larger if the role is that of an (pro)actor rather than a reactor who is obliged to accept – at least partly - the stimuli generated by the initiator.

Undoubtedly, and with respect to pragmatics, all the actors tend to have multiactive responses to the proactive measures or the initialised effects, which means that they take, leave, reject, ignore, transfer, or stipulate, while acting, reacting, or transacting. Hence, they are not tied to *one form of response*. Indeed, it is possible to categorise different kinds of actions and reactions when coping with the question of responses in network e.g. Easton and Lundgren (1992) define five distinctive sequences: *reflection*, *adaptation*, *absorption*, *transmission*, and *transmutation*. Reflection occurs when an actor is rejecting the changes while adaptation implies a situation in which change is managed by negotiations in the dyad not influencing the other members of the network. Absorption is close to adoption as a conceptualisation, since in this response the actor accepts the changes. In the case of transmission, an actor transmits the effects of change to the other

members in the web whereas for transmutation it is typical is that the receiving actor adapts the changes but also transmits the changes – and the requirements and obligations as well – to the rest of the network. In general, Easton and Lundgren (1992) clearly distinguish between responses in a dyad and responses in a net or network context. In this study the main focus is on chosen dyadic relationships, and therefore the network reactions (transmission, transmutation) do not have a prominent role.

Position

Besides role, also the concept of position concept is one of the major constructs in the network theory. Position has been explicitly explained with different attributes like *identity* (Wynstra 1994, 803), *the role* (Anderssen *et al.* 1994), *the importance* (Wynstra 1994, Halinen 1994, 326), or *the strength, characteristics and/or portfolio relationships* (Ford *et al.* 1998, 49), or *contribution to network* (Tikkanen 1997, Ghauri and Holstius 1996). In the organisational theory the position is explained with a group of models and respect attributes like *cohesion, equivalence or prominence* (Nohria 1992, 6). These concepts, and specially the last mentioned, are close to *the role especially through norms and expectations* (Aastrup 2003, 120). Moreover, position is not an absolute determinant but rather relative, meaning different things for different actors (Halinen 1996).

Consistent with concept of role, also position is *generated through relationships*. Mattsson and Johanson (1992, 211) postulate that *'each actor is engaged in a number of exchange relationships with other actors. These relationships define the position of the actor in the network and further 'the concept can used to characterise network structure and network distance between actors'* (ibid.). Interesting is the question of how the role could change because of new initiatives by operators and incidents caused by external stimuli. Also, the tasks and obligations are continuously changing, leading to new positions. Addressing the convergence of the terms we could claim, that, *'the role dimension represents the subjective and creative character of the actor. Moreover, an actor has a position but acts in a role'* (Anderson *et al.* 1998, 172). It seems also that position as a term has dominance over role in network studies (Halinen 1994). Accordingly, the conceptualisation determines *'to what extent an actor is involved in the (exchange) relationship and how much responsibility it has'*. Furthermore, it is an expression of *'breath of the relationship'* implying thus a range of activities and behavioural responses (ibid.)

With these two terms we can also embrace the dynamical aspects of the network. In this study both position and role can refer to change; a new position can be regarded as the actors' attempt to change, redesign and extend the traditional role. Though the proposal seems to be in contrast to the definitions presented by e.g. Halinen (1994, 252), it is in close accordance with her explanations, because for her the term role also includes *'potential to develop and expand the relationship'*. The role includes an option to modify the relationship, which changes the position as well. Moreover, it sets the limits for the behaviour. Furthermore, considering dynamics, *'dynamics in any one network will be unique relative to other networks.'* In other words, the question of position is in accordance with the idea of context-bound phenomenon. Besides, *'the ability of actors to interpret changes and to create meaning of their own and other actors' network positions and roles, is a primary determinant of their subsequent activities and thereby of the network dynamics'* (Halinen 1994, 253).

As noted above, and considering the parallels of these terms, we can not deny the fact that we deal with a context-bound phenomenon. Because of the influence of the structural elements of the network we are obliged to analyse how the actors are embedded in order to understand the position. Conventional evaluation of how an actor is related to other actors is not proper, since it rejects partly the question of embeddedness and the inherent dimensions.

The question of the potential discrepancy between these two terms is interesting since some scholars tend to define solely the role in order to capture the dynamics along with the suggestion that actually the position refers to stability (see e.g. Halinen 1994, Anderson *et al.* 1998). Basically, this dilemma is based on the examination on what the major antecedents and prerequisites for analysing the terms are. If a position is a reflection of structures, and not of interaction processes and inherent relationships, the conceptualisation carries out very strong stable aspects. Theoretically interesting is the question of what the major attributes of the position concept are. As noted above, the primordial question is whether the actors get the roles because of their positions (and because of the structural elements in a network) or whether the roles are created through the interaction processes. In this study the roles are created through the relationships, but they are also an outcome of the structures, whether these are social or others. The role also includes the limits for the behaviour, while the position is rather an expression of the actors will, subject to the most appropriate interorganisational location in the future.

Aastrup (2003, 132) defines network positions as *sensitising concepts*; they are the actors' base for acting in network structure, which means that the question is how an actor relates to the network structures, which enables and constrains the actor in future *activities*. Moreover, in his view more attention should be paid upon analytical matters, instead of theoretising without any practical relevance. We also have to accept the pluralisms of terms and definitions amidst the practitioners as well.

From managerial point of view a position is a strategical tool, when a (focal) firm's one or two property/ies, character, or target - e.g. capability, reputation, identity, attractiveness, service quality, productivity, - is related to others; as Mattsson and Johanson (1992,231) put it '*strategic objectives are defined in terms of network positions*' and '*strategic actions aim at influencing actors, relationships, and network structures*' Referring to the extended conceptualisation of positions', strategic action '*may also aim at restructuring the web of dependencies (in the productions system)*'. As a result, weakening dependency and strengthening interdependencies are evident. Moreover, position means how a single operator operates in relation to others through the relationships created in interaction. To address the managerial approach more closely, position could also refer to need for organisational segregation, and thus to interorganisational proximity: how a firm as an actor distinguishes itself from others in terms of service, product, quality, reputation or identity. In order to maintain the difference, and superiority, consistent identity is required as well as continuous, perpetual analysis and observation for maintaining and protecting the position. Complementarity means modest distance, where as compatibility can be a trigger for starting a deeper collaboration.

In all, with the position interorganisational location in relation to other actors in the network is defined. The deeper the relationship the closer the actors tend to be, which has an impact on their network positions as well. Accordingly, position is appropriate expression of proximity. In this sense position can be associated with questions of

spatiality with main emphasis on the closeness-remoteness- dimension and on spatial embeddedness (see e.g. Anderson *et al.* 1998 or Nikkanen 2000 for more discussion).

The position enables the actors to create strategical solutions; it can be a critical element in strategic planning, because it gives the focal firm a bundle of attainable locations in the network of relationships. The locations are continuously changing in time, which refers to evolutionary processes in the relationships. Hence, in the networks, in which profound changes occur in a relatively short time, a temporal analysis is a prerequisite for the scrutiny. Regarding the evolutionary characteristics of the networks, e.g. the use of the life cycle metaphor has been often employed by researchers when temporal dynamics has been assessed, though several other theories could be more recommendable (Halinen 1996, 65). The strategic performance based on specified position is evaluated and assessed by another party, including historical experience and future expectations (Håkanson and Snehota 1997).

Mattsson and Johanson (1992) enlarge the theoretical discussion of the position by launching two additional terms, *micro and macro* position. Micro position refers to the *strength of the relationship with the other firms*. With macro position Mattsson and Johanson (1992) define '*the functions performed by the firm for other firms specially when exceeding the expectations*' meaning also the relative importance of the firm in the network, and the strength of relationships with other firms. Furthermore, macro position is an expression of the identity of other firms with which the firm has direct and indirect relationships (ibid. 213). There is also a *limited and extended definition* of positions (Mattsson and Johanson 1992).

Because of the fact that position is often a reflection of network structures, *the degree of bonding affects* the position as well. This means that if there exist strong and well-established bonds between the actors, the positions are quite stable despite of efforts for change; this seems to be typical for IM chains. Position changes are also strongly interlinked (Wynstra 1994, 804). A residual change in position can lead to a *domino-effect*: despite of the bonded structures all the actors have to react by means of adaptation caused primordially e.g. by an external stimulus. Position could refer to an array of possible and attainable locations in interorganisational space-time -horizon, occupied by the actors often, but not always, for strategical reasons (as the strategists claim). The position is often it is *an expression of an actors will, subject to an ideal organisational location in the network*; that is among the web of relationships. Hence, positions can be expressions of an ideal state amidst relationships manifesting the actor's strive for repositioning itself - constrained, however, by e.g. structures like structurally bonded nets/network.

As regards practical verification, it is a challenging task for the researcher to analyse this term comprehensively. As Aastrup (2003, 122) puts it '*(...) the concept of position may involve several underlying dimensions (i.e. resources and resource dependencies as well as expectations and roles) making it hard to define the concept in operational terms.*' Moreover, instead of aiming to explain the term/s properly we should pay attention to other interests: '*it makes more sense to ask what the concept of network position directs our attention to and what operative phenomena to measure, identify or explore network positions through*' (Aastrup 2003, 130). Though the additional components mentioned (micro and macro; limited and extended) enrich the theoretical discussion, analytically these proposals as extensions do not contribute to the research work by giving totally new

mindsets for empirical verification (see also e.g. Aastrup 2003, Halinen 1994, Anderson *et al.* 1998). Hence, the relevance of modified terms can be modest in empirical investigation. Finally, and because of the fact that the role and position are different facets of the same phenomenon, we have to accept that there is *an interplay and dualistic interdependency between the concepts*. In other words, we should make an attempt to break the established setting in which there are two major explanatory chains for the definitions: role – processes – dynamic dimension vs. position – structures – stabilising dimensions. Anderson *et al.* (1998, 184) have even created a combined construct – *position-and-role*. On the basis of a case they postulate that ‘*position (is) encapsulated through expectations (...) and role, including (...) intentions, interplay and mutually create the dynamics in business networks*’ (comments in parenthesis added). Figure 2 illustrates the dualistic nature and the interplay between these two concepts (based on Anderson *et al.* 1998)

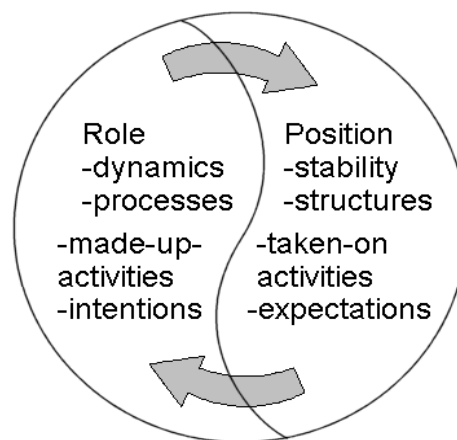


Figure 2. The Bipolarism of the Role-Position Concept

What comes to roles in particular, the structural perspective is emphasised in this study, when analysing the behaviour: the roles are perceived and defined by the operators of the focal net and they are thus consistent with the expectations. Thus, we do not stress the dynamical aspects of the role behaviour as much as some others do when they refer to position and discuss the stable determinants: e.g. Anderson *et al.* (1998) aimed to grasp the subjective and process-oriented character of the actor’s creative nature when exploring the role.

The question of accepting expectations can be associated with the major theoretical roles as well. Typical responses for the reactor are those which take place subsequent to prior activities initiated by the counterparts. Inevitably, the role of an (pro)actor is more subject to own attempts and will than the role of the reactor.

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

In this chapter, some interpretations of the roles of the railway company are explained on the basis of an empirical analysis conducted among the members of the focal net. The research work was done using both broad themes and more accurate semi-structured questionnaires in preliminary interviews (totally 15 informants). Considering the

taxonomy, it should be noted that the roles are partly overlapping and the nature of the distinctive responses is not clear-cut. Besides, an actor can have *multiple roles simultaneously in a broad network structure*. On the basis of the empirical verification it is evident that VR Cargo as a focal firm can have different roles in different relationships. In practice, VR Cargo can be both a contractor and a contractee, having activities, which are typical for both to a subcontractor and to a principal in one specific relationship.

The classification criteria applied in the typology are *twofold*. The *first* question is whether the focal firm deals with *one counterpart* (implying a dyadic relationship) or do the VR Cargo *exposes itself to a range of relationships with all the members in a network*. With the *second* criterion we approach the question of what is the *major nature and character of the actions, reactions, and interactions as responses in general*. Because of the fact that plural, diverse, and even inconsistent type of roles exist in a wider context, the classification of the role by means of a typology is a generalisation, and can not be appropriate in every detail. The roles as described in this chapter appear mostly in a dyadic relationship with a road carrier: the entirety of informants was rather heterogeneous with dispersed primary business areas. These dyads are the most distinctive ones in railbased intermodal solutions, since a combination of two modes – rail and road – is often the major combination in intermodal freight.

In table 1 below the identified roles of a focal firm are explained by means of a typology using descriptive terms for the identified roles. The measures mentioned are simple indicators of the respective roles.

Table 1: A Taxonomy of the Roles of the Focal Firm in IFT

Outside a Focal Net		Integrator	
Inside a Focal Net		↔	
Relationship	Proactive Measures	Interactive Measures	Reactive Measures
'for /with /by many'	Dominator	Common carrier	
'for / with / by some'	Principal	Partner	Subcontractor
Indicative Behavioural Characteristics	Acts Provokes Proactive adaptations	Interacts Adjusts voluntary	Reacts Adopts Coercive adaptations
	Unilateral Determined Discriminative More dependent Influencer	conditionally Mutual Open for all Neutral, arbitratve More independent Passive	unconditionally Unilateral Follower Adopter More dependent Passive

In next, some typical features of the identified roles are discussed more accurately.

Integrator

Particularly, the role of an integrator means, that a carrier can be a Multimodal Transport Operator (MTO) in the strict sense. Typical for MTOs is that they are engaged in transportation activities, typical for which is the transfer of goods in door-to-door- conditions. Practically, we can assume that the role of the TPLs (Third Party Logistics service providers) is to offer a wide array of services by integrating a single carrier's service, and subsequently, sell these services to the clients. It is thus evident that a single operator carrying out the responsibility of a MTO actually takes responsibility of the whole transportation process covering all the modes. Often the megacarriers as service providers are willing to enhance their traditional business performance with new initiatives. Thus, transportation, tied up to haulage in one specific leg, can be enriched by value-adding activities. A virtual integrator is presumably possible, though not verified in this study. The integrators are often not direct members of intermodal freight transportation chain but rather service providers or consolidators in general. Basically, there are two different paths for taking the role of an integrator. A carrier can expand its conventional business area by taking care of new VAL (Value Added Logistics) activities and subsequently providing these service packages to their own clients, or a freight forwarder can combine the services provided by the different modes and sell the entity to their own clients, which implies consolidation. The role of the service integrator is interesting, since it is proposed that this role is not *truly* performed by *any* operator in IM business (cf. Gröhn 1998).

Dominator

With this role a railway company attempts to be a leading-edge company in some specific fields, thus provoking the net members to substantial configurations in their practices regardless of the fact that often the dominator takes the full advantage of the initiatives; this is often both an injunction, an imperative for the operators, and unilateral action. This is not necessarily consistent with the internal norms and practices once created, implying strong hierarchical governance. Significant is the notion that this role can be appropriate for all the network members. Though the focal firm was interested e.g. in developing advanced technology (EDI-based solutions, RailTrace system for tracking and tracing) with robust determination, the role of the dominator was not clearly found out. Though mainly an obligation, there is also a positive aspect to this role. A dominant role in a chain – if coupled with the subrole of an initiator – might *generate positive attraction* among net members for improvements and new acts. Especially the stakeholders agreed that the focal company should take a *more active role* in terms of investments, resources and other commitments. To characterise this type of behaviour, we claim that the focal actor's attractiveness is high; it absorbs interest, which is mostly a positive phenomenon. Nevertheless, a dominator can also be non-attractive, or non-appealing because of the strong relative bargaining power over a large number of network members. An actor can, however, trigger out the development. This specific role requires recognised prestige, supremacy, and superiority causing authority within a network. Other typical features of this role are size, power, technological prominence, and strong network identity, which all awake interest among other participants and operators.

Principal

Although principal is mainly a legal concept addressing the importance of the contractual bond, in this study this particular role is defined differently. It is *a determined and proactive course of action in a dyadic relationship, in which the railway company either strongly and unilaterally or modestly influences the decisions made in the relationship*. Moreover, the network member is recurrently or slightly obliged to adopt certain types of activities or practices in order to ensure the continuity of the relationship, which indicates compliance. On the other hand, and especially in the long run, there are plenty of benefits and rewards for the other party as well, which make this kind of relationship appealing and increase its attractiveness. It is also assumed that the counterpart considers the propositions and initiatives as they are; these suggestions are later converted to new activities. Hence, the created relationship is an *asymmetric* one in terms of bargaining power, control, pace in developing the business relationship, and governance, which bring better outcomes for the principal. In general, the principal has slight dominance over another. In this study it was found out that *this role was not prominent*, since the role of the focal firm is so strong that to move the role to a different position is difficult and often not even aspired for.

Common Carrier

The term common carrier has many connotations, depending on the context where it is applied. Mostly, it is a legal concept in some jurisdiction, e.g. where common law doctrine gives a solid basis for legal matters. In this study, however, the term denotes a specific role having some special characteristics and respect indicators. It was verified that the *status of the common carrier is a major role for a focal firm in the network context*. In this sense, this specific role is a reflection of the network identity. Defined in this way, the role is strongly in accordance with the expectations perceived and declared by the focal net members in the interviews. Based on this specific role the focal firm *expresses its involvement* in the IM network.

Partner

As the role of the common carrier was rather evident for network relationships, a partner can be defined to describe reciprocal co-operation under pairwise *relationships*. In this study the partner is a concept which refers to *equal collaboration between a focal firm and its counterpart in a dyadic relationship in terms of risk sharing, investments, and efforts*. Many of the relationships are actually dyadic by nature. This means that though a common carrier is an expression of a network identity, this network role is also a basis for arranging dyadic matters. In all, the characteristics of the common carrier type of behaviour are transferred to the role of a partner. The focal firm's counterpart presumes that the principles and policies which are typical for a common carrier are also valid and applicable in the dyadic relationship.

Often the outcome of long mutual interaction is that the partners gain a certain degree of stability, which means, however, that both potential rewards' including the success, and conflicts are present. Collision of interests is natural, especially if the partners represent potential rivals in the long run

Subcontractor

In general, subcontracting refers to unequal distribution of power, and has a strong legal connotation. In the role of the subcontractor, the counterpart explicitly or implicitly presumes and insists that the activities made by the focal firm – even short run episodes – are more or less reactive in nature. The focal firm continuously responds even in a slight manner to initiatives made by the network member. In all, it is expected that VR Cargo should adopt new kinds of solutions, if it is willing to co-operate in the long run. These reactive measures are a necessity, since a collaborator expects some form of a signal because of their own proactive measures. In the embryonic stage of the relationship, there are just a few, discrete transactions, but later both parties express willingness to co-operate more closely. Later, the integrative efforts are an assurance for deepening the liaison. Because of the long co-existence, the roles are stable, and they indicate an asymmetric relationship: the IM service provided by the focal firm is just indirectly affected by the needs of the final customer. It is possible that with the same client VR Cargo is both the subcontractor, or contractee (e.g. providing linehaul for containers) and contractor (e.g. buying delivery service in short pick-up deliveries).

CONCLUSIONS

It was theoretically suggested that the dual term of position-and-role can be employed in the empirical analysis. Subsequently, it was found out that the major role of the focal company in the network context is the *common carrier*. This role contains some typical characteristics like rather open disclosure of the visions expressing focal firms' strategical will attached by a stable and predictable organisational behaviour. Most important is the notion that the focal company is neutral for all the other operators, and willing to enhance and strengthen collaboration with all the members in the IM network. This also means, that all the other members of the network are equal in terms of customer satisfaction. Besides, the adjustments intensify the captured role. The focal company is also tied to its role since there is still a government-erected right to be the sole operator on domestic tracks. The roles of a dominator, principal, partner, subcontractor and integrator were also introduced. On the basis of the results of this study, a more detailed in-depth analysis is needed to clarify the details of the different roles, especially with respect to major behavioural indicators.

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