

# **A Network Approach to the Broadening of the Offering: Beyond Added Services**

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## **Abstract**

Research concerning the marketing of industrial products highlights the importance of the services “surrounding” the product as sources of competitive advantage. Several attempts at classification have been put forward to characterise these services. Mathieu (1999) distinguishes those services which support the supplier’s product (SSP) and those which support client’s action (SSC) in relation to the supplier’s product. Following our work on specific cases, we have seen that other types of services do exist: client services with no direct link to the supplier’s products but whose aim is to help the client develop activity and market position, and services supporting the client’s network (SSN). This final type of service is specific to project marketing and system selling. At the end of this paper we shall underline some managerial repercussions created by such service offers.

## **Introduction**

Services « surrounding » products have an impressive number of virtues as can be seen from the related research into the subject (Furrer, 1997) : they allow to create value for the customer, they allow the customer to reduce cost-in-use and time, they help the development of the customer/supplier relationship by creating a favourable working environment with increased access to information... Basically, they offer the company a competitive advantage via the development of a product/service couple. (Langeard et Eiglier, 1988). Confronted with this information, Parasuraman (1998) underlines the need for research to discover and understand the conditions in which a “superior” service can give lasting competitive

advantage on industrial markets. Moreover, he highlights the need for a precise classification of such services.

Many classifications of industrial products and services have been proposed in previous works, but “classification of industrial services has not received the same level of attention as has the categorization of consumer services” (Boyt et Harvey, 1997, p. 294). Among the more recent classifications, those developed by Mathieu (1994 and 1999) are closest to our research into industrial marketing (Dontenwill, 1997) and project marketing and system selling, notably for complex services (Cova and Salle, 1996). For Mathieu (1999) a distinction has to be made between the service which supports the supplier’s product (SSP) and the service which supports the client’s action in relation to the supplier’s product (SSC). The aim of the SSP is to solve problems which are directly related to the supplier’s product, for example support, which contributes to the availability of the supplier’s product for the customer. The aim of the SSC is to solve problems linked to the running of the customer’s activity, for example training to improve customer skills in the use of the supplier’s product. According to Mathieu (1999), both SSC and SSP are part of the products/services offer equation, in the marketing of this offer and its payment, which suggests they are both paid for by the customer in one way or another. These distinctions go hand in hand with the classifications of services made by Lovelock (1983) and Fitzsimmons et al (1998).

In this paper we shall compare this distinction between SSP and SSC with empirical case studies in different Business-to-Business fields of application, in order to clearly understand this distinction and to continue in the same line of thought as Parasuraman (1998). First, we will compare the distinction with the reality of marketing industrial products, then, with the reality of project marketing and system selling, and finally, look at some theoretical and managerial repercussions. Our work is based on the case studies we carried out for research purposes in companies.

## **1. SSP, SSC and the Marketing of industrial products.**

### **1.1 Case study: Sun Microsystems.**

Founded in 1982 in California, a pioneer of network computing, Sun has a turnover of 10 billion dollars and employs 26.000 people in 150 countries. Sun supplies hi-tech products for all products which can be connected to the Web, from the smart card to the super-calculator. In 1987 Sun created the formula which has given it the success it knows today: “*the Network is the computer*”. Sun Microsystems offers an open architecture with the possibility of evolving or connecting to non-Sun equipment and systems.

Increasing concerns in profitability has led customers to optimising their computer system running costs. They increasingly require guarantees concerning the availability of their computer systems rather than for support. Indeed, competitiveness is now a question of the unfailing availability of human and material resources, particularly when the system is vital for company activity. For example, a one-hour systems failure can cost 100 000FF for a newspaper publisher. Sun responds to these demands by “enabling its clients to maximise benefit from its on-line system to create decisive competitive advantage” by offering “a variety of top of the range services to help customers in the conception, setting up and management of the company’s on-line computer systems” (Sun document).

Sun’s three main service offers are : advice and integration, training and support. Sun proposes 4 kinds of contracts, each corresponding to a level of commitment according to the

importance of the equipment for the customer and the type of support offered in case of breakdown: platinum, gold, silver, bronze.

	<i>OBJECTIVES</i>	<i>SERVICE OFFER</i>
<b>Platinum</b>	Support for company systems of absolute necessity ("mission critical ") with guaranteed results : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breakdown prevention</li> <li>• Rapid reconfiguration if required</li> <li>• Maximisation of system availability.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Account manager dedicated to the customer</li> <li>• Technical support team dedicated to the customer</li> <li>• On-site assistance</li> <li>• Telephone hot-line 24h/24, 7 days/week</li> <li>• Treatment or on-site intervention within 2 hours</li> <li>• Electronic monitoring</li> <li>• Training</li> </ul>
<b>Gold</b>	Support for vital company systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid reconfiguration if required</li> <li>• Diagnosis, prevention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Account manager</li> <li>• Technical support team dedicated to the customer</li> <li>• Telephone hot-line 24h/24, 7 days/week</li> <li>• Treatment or on-site intervention within 4 hours</li> <li>• Training</li> </ul>
<b>Silver</b>	On-site company systems support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone hot-line from 8h to 20 h during week days</li> <li>• Treatment or on-site intervention within 4 or 8 hours according to the urgency of the situation</li> </ul>
<b>Bronze</b>	Support for clients who can continue operating temporarily but who need however basic assistance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone hot-line from 9h to 18h during week days</li> <li>• Treatment or on-site intervention the following day</li> </ul>

## 1.2 Case study : Air Liquide

Air liquide's principal activity is the supply of industrial gases (oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, liquid air...) to companies in different sectors such as the steel industry, chemical industry, glass, wood-pulp, food-processing, health, electronics, space industry. The company has developed a wide offer of services whose aim is to take over the administration of industrial gases in the customer's operating system. The aim is to break away from the trivialisation of its products. As Air Liquide's CEO explains, "I am convinced that any industrial company, can escape from the basic logic of commodity products and find multiple ways to develop above and beyond his base activity to enhance and enrich it without, however, selling themselves"

This strategy has been implemented throughout the group. In 1998, services represented 14% of company turnover, and this should double within 5 years. Air Liquide proposes 4 levels of service provision which clearly underlines its evolution:

1. the supply of gas
2. logistics: automatic restocking from a given threshold using electronic surveillance, management of bottles of gas at the customer's production site..

3. equipment and network implementation of gases in the customer's production process: advice about the use of gases and their dangers, training according to the gases used, listing needs, design, setting up and support of the installations for gas supply in the customer's production process,...
4. application of the gas and customer production process: Air Liquide undertakes the design, setting up and support of the customer's production process, for example, fast-freezing equipment for a company in the food-processing industry.

### **1.3 Analysis of the industrial products cases.**

The Sun case underlines the importance of SSC as defined by Mathieu (1999). Their objective is to support customer system within a given framework of availability, meaning they support the customer's activity in relation with the product bought by the customer, i.e. the computer equipment sold by Sun.

The analysis of the offer presented in the Air Liquide case allows us to make a distinction between several service levels:

Level 1 corresponds to the product offer

Level 2 corresponds to the SSP, a large range of disposal services, some of which can almost be considered as SSC. For example, the surveillance of stocks, as this contributes to customer activity and its use of the gas products.

Level 3 represents services supporting the customer (SSC) using the supplier's products

Level 4 is also an SSC but which requires different supplier (and also client) involvement in client activity and is completely different from the three previous levels.

Therefore, even within the SSC themselves, we can make a distinction between:

- Services in accordance with the supplier's product (SSC1)
- Services with no direct link with the supplier's products, but whose objective is to help customer activity and market position (SSC2).

The latter (SSC2) occur most commonly in close supplier-customer relationships. This is the case during the implementation of solution selling approaches (Azimont, Cova and Salle, 1999). The same approaches can also be found among suppliers who have chosen to create key account management function (Pardo, 1999) where the objective is to contribute to customer strategy rather than responses to specifications defined by the customer.

Experience shows that today the offers of many industrial product companies joins the SSC2 group. This evolution raises many questions which we shall return to in the final part of our paper.

## **2. SSP, SSC and the marketing of projects and systems**

### **2.1 Case study: Waste disposal in Marseille**

Marseille boasts Europe's largest opencast tip, just 40 kilometres north of the city in Entressen. In 1994, the European Community decided to finance a project to close the tip and to set up an incineration and waste-recycling system plant. An invitation to bid was launched. Many companies made bids for the design, construction and running of the incineration plant. Entressen had to shut down by 2001.

The city council analysed the bids and short-listed three:

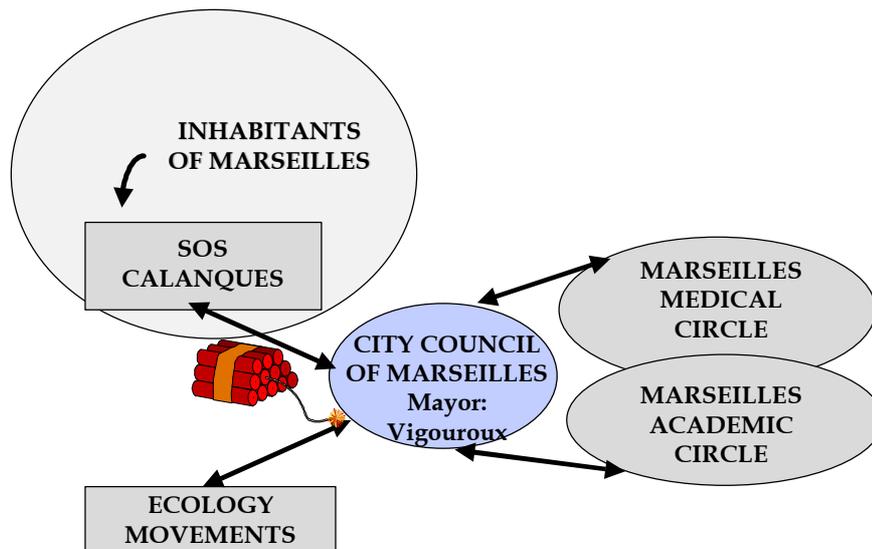
- La Générale des Eaux and Lyonnaise-Dumez representing the Sodemith group ;
- EdF, which joined forces with the Caisse des Dépôts, via its subsidiary Pronergie;

- The huge American Waste Management, which is relying on its partnership with the SAE and the creation of a joint subsidiary Auxiwaste to penetrate the French market;
- The other groups, in relatively weak positions on the Marseille industrial milieu were eliminated. These included Bouygues and its subsidiary Saur, which have never really managed to penetrate the southern French market.

After months of negotiation, the technical and financial bids began to take shape. Auxiwaste proposed original technical solutions to the city councillors with sorting and recovery sites, while the two other competitors proposed more classical and almost identical solutions. In all three cases, they all concentrated on the setting up of a system which would appeal to the Greens and other ecology movements.

However, to stand out from the competition, all the competitors particularly concentrated on elements of the bids which had no direct link with the techniques which were at the heart of the deal, but which rather were directly related with the city council's activities:

- The SAE demonstrated a real desire to invest in the city of Marseille, particularly in the Grand Prado building complex or the Prado-Carénage tunnel. By doing so, it was looking to help the council's urban development projects (Marseille had got left behind under the previous Mayor). Waste Management guaranteed an ecological remediation of the famous Entressen tip which could do nothing but satisfy those who could have opposed the project, the Greens.
- The couple Générale des Eaux and Lyonnaise-Dumez was prepared to give serious financial help to get the Porte d'Aix building project, or a smaller version, off the ground. The "Cité de la Biotique" the city's biotic centre may see the light one day thanks to the participation of a subsidiary of the Générale des Eaux. Once again this would help the Council with its urban development projects and also the Mayor himself, Doctor Vigouroux, in relation to a group of local supporters, the Marseille medical profession. Moreover, the two companies propose the creation of an environmental research centre between the Marseille Engineering school and the University's sciences and technological engineering institute which would clearly please another group of Vigouroux supporters, the academic circles.
- Finally, EDF offered to help with the protection of the famous rocky inlets much prized by the Marseillais, and where it owns land and already organises social integration programmes for young people from the city's suburbs. In Marseille, the inhabitants do not say "the calanques" but rather "our" calanques. Recently, there have even been threatening voices saying "Hands off our calanques!". The inhabitants are afraid of seeing them disappear under the cement of the building contractors, the money of the local business community and the technocratic underhand workings of the city council. Indeed, the latter has even been accused of wanting to use the Land Use Plan to build in places where there has never been anything but pine trees, scraggy oak trees, stunted by the Mistral, and huge white rocks. In the spring of 1992, while the local election was in full swing, an ecologist raised the question during a debate and almost immediately there was a public outcry. An association, "SOS Calanques" was created. The harbour (the Vieux Port) was ablaze with rumours concerning the limits of the land which can be built on. Not one week goes by without R. Vigouroux, a self-proclaimed ecologist, being attacked. It is therefore in his own interest that the members of this association are satisfied!



**Diagram 1 : The buying decision process for the Marseille waste disposal project.**

Two interpretations are possible of all the above complementary offers to the suppliers' bids:

- First, they are all SSC. All the bids try to help the city council (or even the Mayor himself) as far as the protection of the environment is concerned. This is at the heart of the deal with each potential supplier. However, although some services involve simple construction projects they would nevertheless appear to help the Council even if there is no direct link with the core of the transaction itself.
- A second possible interpretation is that each competitor tries to establish links in the buying network surrounding the Council by offering to some actors (generally non-business actors) a specific service which is more or less in relation with the heart of the transaction (even if only hinted at). Auxiwaste is looking for the support of, and trying to mobilise, the ecologist movements by offering site remediation for Entressen. Somedith is looking for a more political support from the Mayor in the medical and academic circles by offering the biotic centre and also to finance the creation of an environmental protection research institute. Pronergie is opting for a more societal approach, by hoping to mobilise the inhabitants of Marseilles who seem more concerned by the protection of "their" calanques than the creation of housing projects or a "Cité de la Biotique".

In all three cases, we can not speak of « gifts » to influence such and such an actor in the decision process, but rather complementary offers, or additional services, as part of a package deal. They are neither separate items, but part and parcel of what can be called global offers to the decision making process. This allows for the reconstruction, or reorganisation, of the buying centre by recruiting and involving actors who are able to take into consideration the added value created by these different elements of the offers. We can therefore speak of a creation of value for these actors although there is no direct transfer of money since the City Council will be paying for everything. Therefore, other than the SSC, there are parts of the offers which could be called Services supporting the customer's network (SSN). But, are these services additional services or additional offers?

## 2.2 Case study : STX in Poldavia<sup>73</sup>

In 1999, the Poldavian armed forces finalised the purchase of intelligent weapons to renew their stock of military equipment. For this, an invitation to bid was sent to three world competitors. Rather than compare the three bids which have not been made public, we shall concentrate on the analysis of one of the competitors, STX. STX is a multinational company from North America and world leader in many defence related fields. The company made a bid for the Poldavian project, although it had not really anticipated the project as much as its German competitor DDX which had better relations with the customer. STX's bid was called "Poldavia and STX... Meeting the challenges of the next century together" and was made up of three parts: the customer's challenges, STX solutions, expected customer benefits.

In the introduction to its bid, STX mentions that the Poldavian armed forces were looking to purchase a new "multi-function" weapons system and that the Poldavian government also wanted a programme of industrial cooperation to benefit the people on a socio-economic level. Thus, STX offered its weapons systems and the technologies required to meet the country's military and socio-economic challenges.

According to STX, Poldavia had four principal tasks :

- To equip the armed forces (represented by the Poldavian Armed Forces);
- To improve the quality of the environment and reduce air pollution in Poldalski, the capital of Poldavia (represented by the City Council);
- To improve educational standards (represented by the Ministry for Education and the ENFICLES project);
- To develop and diversify the country's economy (represented by the Ministry of Finance and Foreign Trade).

STX's proposals were the following :

- STX's *Weapon Enterprise* which corresponds to the army's requirements and ensures continued relations between the US Army and the Poldavian Armed Forces;
- Possibilities for industrial cooperation thanks to STX's worldwide presence and experience (direct offsets with POLDER and PTS + help improving production and marketing for POLDER and PTS);
- The innovative technologies used in the control systems of the new STX buses for the city of Poldalski;
- STX's expertise as leading service provider to the US Department of Defence for distance learning;
- The STX-HW partnership to promote Poldavia's production and industries via the creation of a hub to stimulate the whole of the Poldavian economy and to promote Poldavian trade with Eastern Europe and the U.S.

According to STX, Poldavia will subsequently obtain lasting benefits from an agreement with them:

- Better defence, at a cost adapted to Poldavia's revenue, linked to the development and growth of Poldavia's defence industry;

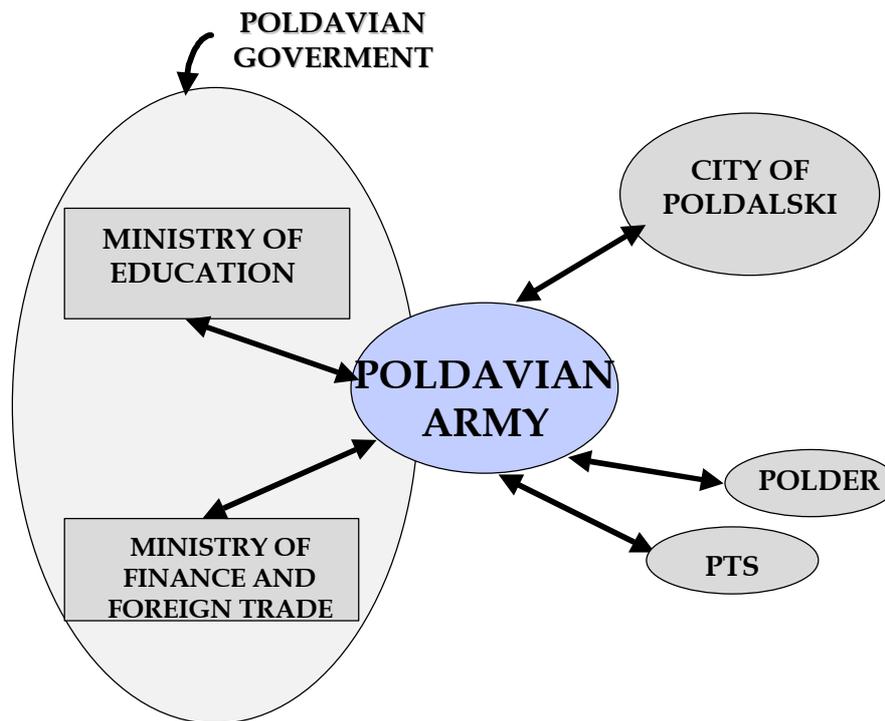
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<sup>73</sup> For reasons of confidentiality, the names used are fictional.

- A cleaner environment in Poldalski thanks to the reduced pollution of its public transport;
- An improved education system and equal opportunities for all at a reduced cost;
- Accentuated economic growth thanks to skilful marketing initiatives.

In the case of STX's offer to Poldavia, the targets in the buying decision network are clearly labelled. The additional offer also. When we analyse the offer, we clearly see that at the heart of the offer are the weapons, around which gravitate:

- A clearly defined and enhanced group of service-based STX services (and its national partners in an industrial group) for the country's military-industrial set-up (operational equipment support, equipment adaptation, prices, financial arrangements) known under the name *Weapon Enterprise*. STX then accompanied its offer with direct offsets for the two local defence industries PTS and POLDER. As with most offset agreements, they were accompanied by transfers of technologies to improve PTS and POLDER's output and sales. Despite this widened offer, STX continues to address the same traditional decision-making body, the army.
- A more heterogeneous group of services for the country's socio-economic set-up : indirect offsets (with the hub) and other actions to help the customer-country. Included in the contributions to the country, STX included elements such as technological skills for the pollution-free buses, experience in distance-learning and potential investment in the country's economy. In this part of the socio-economic offer, there is both an argument which enhances/justifies the offer for the customer (this represents a "soft" part of the offer, it is very communicative, almost an argument to justify the purchase in the eyes of the people), and a "hard" part which concerns additional services for the potential actors of the purchasing decision-making network other than the army (Poldaski City Council, Ministry for Education, Ministry for Tourism...).



**Diagram 2 : The purchasing decision network for the Poldavian Weapons Systems project.**

Once again, SSN style services are clearly visible. STX tries to help the actors of the Poldavian purchasing decision-making network with an additional offer of services with no relation to the heart of the transaction. Such additional services are not offered for free; they are paid for, in part, by the principal transaction between STX and the Poldavian military, and partly via specific contracts with each of the actors in question.

### **2.3. Analysis of project marketing and system selling cases.**

The study of these two cases of project marketing and system selling:

- legitimates our distinction within the SSC between the customer services in relation to the supplier's product (SSC1) and customer services with no direct relation to the supplier's product but whose aim is to help the customer's activity and market position (SSC2)
- offers a new distinction between the SSC1 or 2 and the SSN (services which support the client's network action). The latter can not simply be limited to the purely communicational or relational dimension of project marketing (Björkman and Kock, 1995), which would confine them to a purely classical vision of marketing. Indeed, they are often part of the offer made not to the customer but to a buying decision making network and are either directly or indirectly paid for by the actors concerned. However, they can partly be found in the compensation-countertrade part of the offer (Fletcher, 1996 and 1998)<sup>74</sup>, and more specifically as indirect offsets of the offer (Ahlström et Brege, 1998 and 1999) even if this is just part of their role. The indirect offsets, developed by Ahlström and Brege (1999),

<sup>74</sup> Fletcher suggested a classification in 5 categories : counter purchase; buyback; offsets; debt; barter.

underline the fact that the offer of an offset is an offer to buy ( the selling of customer network products) rather than to sell, and is therefore not paid by but to the buying decision making network which is not the case for the other additional services analysed in the cases.

What is known as the global offer approach, and which includes the SSP, SSC and SSN, and which has been developed in project marketing and system selling, is typical of a network approach in which the supplier mobilises and recruits new actors to reorganise the buying centre (Cova, Salle and Vincent, 1999). The supplier not only seeks to influence via a relational process which can sometimes be construed as the trading of favours, but also tries to directly or indirectly create value. Thus, the supplier seeks out the most suitable buying decision making network according to his skills and the group's skills. His approach is centred on a coupling between the scope of the additional services and the decision making process in the buying decision making network surrounding the customer.

### **3. Some managerial implications**

The move from services which support the product (SSP) and services which support the customer (SSC 1 and SSC 2) to services which support the customer's network (SSN) leads to a real break in many fields: the marketing approach, the company positioning, the required employee skills, the supplier's involvement and responsibility towards the client, the competitive situation.

The following represent some consequences for companies producing industrial products and which include services "surrounding" the product to enhance their offer.

#### **A radical change in customer approach**

For the supplier, the break between the three levels of service offer surrounding the product (SSP, SSC, SSN) reflects a radical change in his perception of the customer. Consequently, suppliers approach their customers differently. This is reflected in the major changes they make to their offers, changes in the customer's decision making unit they take into account and the suitable organisation they adopt. One of the first consequences for the supplier is to move from the needs stated by the customer to an approach which takes into consideration the customer's strategic challenges. This refocusing means a different service offer as it is concentrated more on the customer's activity than on the customer's products: this represents a major paradigmatic change in the vision of how the customer and the market operates.

In other words, in a logic of differentiation, industrial product companies have developed their offers by adding more and more services directly linked to products in order to help the implementation of the product by, and for, the customer. Such an approach has been at the centre of industrial marketing for a long time in order to establish a relation with a customer by "gluing" the two actors together.

Indeed, we can talk of a paradigmatic change as the company, considering the customer's activity as the perimeter of a relevant analysis, can propose value adding offers (solutions) which require the integration of partners (subsidiaries or other external organisations). This is project marketing and solution selling field. We do not have the same market characteristics nor the same processes as for the marketing of industrial products.

### **Concerning the organisation and its functioning.**

The broadening of the offer (from SSP to SSC) via the move from a logic of taking into account technical needs of the customer to a logic of understanding the customer's challenges raises the question of the functioning of the organisation. Actually the situations appear more complex and need more adapted approaches to the specificities of each customer.

Is it possible to continue with a traditional marketing and sale organisation with products managers, market managers and geographical sales force? Increasingly we can see that more attention is paid to the customer dimension via teams which are responsible for managing key account and whose role is to increase and create maximum customer value. What is the relation between key account managers (KAM) and the other functions (the part time marketers) since there is no hierarchical difference between the two?

One organisational element which raises a number of questions within the industrial products companies concerns the position of the units in charge of SSP, SSC or SSN services. There are two possible cases:

- The unit is a resource to be used for the promotion of the core of the offer, mainly the products. The service is seen to enhance the product differentiation. It is part of the product package and almost inseparable from it. This is the case for SSP and SSC 1 services.
- The unit is a profit centre. Usually, the service offers involved are SSC2 and SSN services. The question is, what is the role of these services in the sale of the products? Indeed, divergence can appear between units which are responsible for the product and SSP and those which are responsible for the offer of SSC and SSN services. Of course, both types of units can sell separately, or intervene in offer arrangements, together or alone. The problem and risk with this type of situation is the accumulation of profit margin each unit takes which leads to an extravagant overall market cost for the product-services sold.

### **A problem of managing technical and human resources.**

In this process of broadening their offer of services for a given product (SSP, SSC1, SSC 2, SSN), the industrial products companies are moving towards the dematerialisation of their offers. According to Mathieu (1999), companies are moving away from a focus on products and production technologies, to a focus on services and human resources management. In some cases, the move towards pure services (facility management) is possible. Hence the cultural problems within a company and the problems of making major changes in managerial practices. We can also add that the offers sometimes result from a grouping of skills from external organisations as in the case of project marketing and system selling.

We feel the difficulty comes from the need to simultaneously manage, coordinate and mobilise:

- production technologies able to produce products with specific technical characteristics;
- human resources able to design, create and offer services of differing complexity;
- external resources, in other words both technologies and human resources to be able to create offers, notably in project marketing and system selling.

### **The customer's perception of interdependence with a supplier : loss of autonomy or access to more skills ?**

The more a company creates value for a customer by broadening its offer, the greater the interdependence between the two organisations. In fact, the main question is the following: will the customer accept this interdependence? How will he interpret it? The problem is ambiguous in as far as the more the supplier creates value for the customer via his service offer (SSP>SSC1>SSC2>SSN) the more the latter's dependence increases. The customer can interpret such a relationship as:

- either a loss of autonomy, leaving the supplier with the possibility of abusing his position
- or an "insurance policy", guaranteeing the supplier's commitment.

These are the limits of such an approach to an offer in industrial marketing which clearly gains support from an increased offer of services. Moreover, the customer's acceptance of a certain level of interdependence must lead the supplier to adopt a careful strategy in his choice of customer and his management of supplier-client relationships.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper we have concentrated on the question of the classification of the service offer "surrounding" products from industrial products manufacturers. Using case studies, we have shown the existence of 4 types of such services. Two had already been presented by Mathieu (1999), services which support the supplier's product (SSP) and services which support the client's actions in relation to the supplier's product (SSC, which we have called SSC1). Two new types of services have been found: services which have no direct link with the supplier's product but which help customer activity and market position (SSC2) and services which support the customer's network (SSN). The latter (SSN) are used mainly by companies which sell complex systems and equipments (project marketing and system selling field). To conclude, we have underlined the managerial repercussions which result from the development of the offer of services for industrial products and projects manufacturers.

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