How to approach purchasing and marketing practices in the Danish pine furniture industry?

WORK-IN-PROGRESS PAPER/IMP 2005

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to give practical focus in research relationships, looking at the challenges faced by researchers using inductive approach in order to define the research area and collect data. It is based on the researchers' experience to penetrate an environment without tradition for academic research.

The subjects of study are 9 companies in the pine furniture industry in Denmark, of which 1 is a supplier of pinewood components in the industry. These companies decided to partially finance 2 PhD-projects in order to increase their level of understanding in two areas: Purchasing and Marketing.

The fact that the companies are direct competitors and have short-term pragmatic expectations from this project has added significant pressure in the research relationship. For this reason, it has been necessary to direct attention to the trustful relationship between the researchers and their objects of study as it is the main door of access to the data for the project. And as a result assure the quality of the research, as it is dependent on the type of information the companies are willing to disclose.

Keywords: pine furniture, research relationship, expectation and trust.

Introduction

Before deepening our study in the marketing and purchasing practices of Danish pine furniture manufacturers we faced a practical problem: how to ensure the quality of information for an inductive/abductive research?

Nine Danish companies took the initiative to start 2 PhD projects dealing with purchasing/sourcing and sales/marketing practices. The catalysts for this decision are the director from the Development Center for Furniture and Wood (UMT) and Prof. Laurids Hedaa, from Center of Applied Management Studies (CAMS) in Herning. Due to their efforts, and more than 30 meetings during 2 years with owners and managers of companies producing pine furniture, some decided that it was time to make an investment in that direction. However, even at the moment of decision there was need for a push from Prof. Hedaa who was getting tired of the scepticism of the group towards academic contribution to this industry and of listening to the same problems over and over again. At one point, he stated the question of who would be willing to be a part of, not one, but two PhD projects. He claimed that one person was not enough to tackle the group as it was required a critical mass to allow for a better overview. Two managers raised their hands and they hanged alone for some long seconds in the air before slowly other hands started to join in. Still, not everybody in the group was ready for this type of commitment, and some hands were kept down.

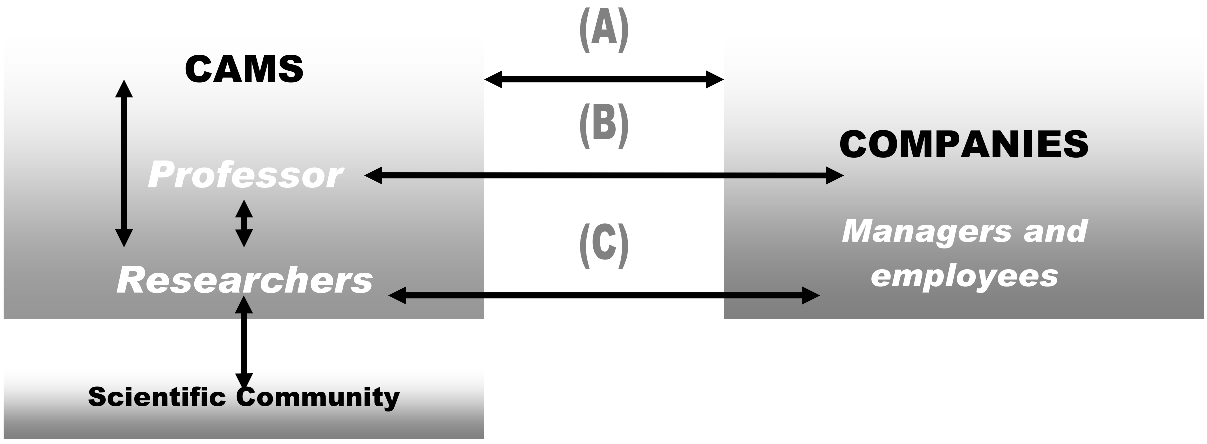
Despite the fact that the companies are located in Jutland within the radius of 120 km, in the Salling district, for some of these managers it was the first time they were sitting in the same room. Therefore one should not disregard nor minimize the fact that for a long time they have seen each other as rivals, and to decide to start a co-operation of this nature was a result of need, as many pointed out in the first round of interviews. The areas of research, i.e. sourcing/purchasing and marketing/sales were pointed out by the companies, as from their evaluation commercial capabilities have been lacking, and thus resulted in poor financial performance in the past years.

At the hiring time, there were only 2 companies involved in the interviews of the researchers, the first ones to raise their hands. The others did not know the researchers at all. As a way of getting the first acquaintance to the group there was a reception. We were introduced to the managers of the firms as having the required ability for a PhD project and coming from countries closely related to wood, namely Finland and Brazil. We had a preconception that because they were partners in such a project, it was a result of being able to collaborate in other aspects of the business. During those few hours we could already find out that these companies had difficulties in talking to each other. The topics were shallow and did not last long. These observations lead us to the question: how long will it take for them to open up and if they will at all. Therefore, already at that point, the relationship between the researchers and the managers gained relevance.

It is possible to map out 6 main streams of relationships within the project, as shown in figure 1. We understand that the inter-organizational relations between CAMS and the group of companies (relationship A), or between Prof. Hedaa and the companies (relationship B), had the minimal trust required for the financial commitment to take place. According to Webb (1991) some trust is required to initiate collaboration, but the research relationships (relationships C) take relevance in order to keep and nurture the initial trust established, create openness and ensure quality on the data collected.

One should note that the researchers have an additional load of relationships when taken into account the requirements for the fulfilment of a PhD project. The relationship within the scientific community, advisors and colleagues also gain relevance as they restrict the time to take care of the research relationships (C). However at this time we will restrain our focus on the relationship between the companies and the researchers.

Figure 1 – Main relationships in the project



It is also important to take a look at the timing of this project, which has implications into the highly unspecified managers' expectations and the daily uncertainty they face.

Pine furniture producers have observed their significant decrease in sales and profit margins, alongside difficulties in positioning their products abroad. Moreover, pine furniture is perceived as a discount product (BAT 2003), despite the high quality outcome of the Danish production. One reasoning for this outcome has been the continuously price reduction worldwide. Danish companies gave in to price pressures, which have spread over every European market and caused an expectation in the customer base (retailers and end-users) for discount prices all the time. Companies that focused their business in the material of the furniture, pine wood, and its production process are now facing extreme competition not only among themselves, but also from substitutes, like furniture made of particle and MDF-boards. They also face competition from Eastern European and Asiatic producers, where access to cheaper labour and raw material have accentuated the focus on cost efficiency throughout the pine furniture supply chain worldwide. A general trend observed in most traditional industries.

In this context of fierce price competition and globalization issues some of these companies are not sure if they will survive through the next year. Two weeks after the reception, we had our first interview with one of the managers. Right at the beginning he informed us that he would have to leave us for about half an hour as he had to fire 9 people that day. Some of the workers knew what would happen and we could sense it as we took our tour at the factory. The atmosphere was heavy, and it gave us our first reality check of what is going on with these companies. As we read about the consolidation and exits in the industry, we had missed the context of frustration among the owners and employees. Not later than a month since the start of the project, one of the researchers was on the way to a second round of interview in another company when she received a call. The purchase manager notified her that the company went bankrupt and consequently the meeting was cancelled.

Therefore, the managers have a practical expectation that the project will be able to indicate the rules for survival in the business in a very short time. An unrealistic expectation from the start, as researchers are not consultants and the timeframe for the project is 3 years, not 3 months. We are not in a position to dispute these expectations but they need to be, somehow, incorporated in the project otherwise the managers may loose interest and block the information flow required for the project.

Relevance of research relationships in an inductive approach

The fact that the researchers are linked to the Center for Applied Market Sciences (CAMS) already indicates the angle from which purchasing and marketing practices will be looked upon. The centre follows the line of thoughts of the research network International Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group, which has focused studies on relationships and networks and developed frameworks for understanding them. In this sense, case studies have been the preferred methodological approach in networks. In our case, the need to look for a problem that is of relevance for the companies and the academic research simultaneously stresses the inductive/abductive nature of this multiple case study. Therefore, Dubois and Araujo's (2004) view of cases as a convoluted process of systematic iteration and combination of empirical evidence, theoretical frameworks and persistent reframing of what it is we are studying, is more aligned to our perception of case method than the linear process proposed by Yin (1994).

Halinen and Törnroos (2005) identified four challenges of case research for a researcher: network boundaries, time, complexity and case comparisons. In this project we can already identify the existence of the first three. Case comparisons are relevant for studies that aim to generate theory and at this initial stage it is not possible to foresee if a theory will be one of the outcomes.

The fact that the study was "born" as a multiple case, that is, the researchers were not able to choose their sampling, has minimized the challenges of network boundaries. We will focus on the 8 companies left in the group and their main relationships regarding purchasing and marketing activities. Time issues have from the start showed their implications to the project. As the research is done in a contemporary timeframe, significant changes are bound to occur. The researchers need to address the changes relevant for these companies which may lead to significant shift in the research direction. In addition, the pressure between the short-term more pragmatic expectations from these companies and the long-term academic nature of the project will be a constant challenge to tackle.

Complexity issues relate to the heterogeneity observed among the companies. There are companies of different sizes, and differences in placement in the supply chain, structures, strategies, as well as diverse pragmatic expectations. In practice this means that the research question will have to be able to permeate throughout the heterogeneity of companies. This means that the researchers need to simultaneously observe the differences among them and find a common thread of relevance to all.

Besides the challenges pointed out by Halinen and Törnroos (2005), in practice, another issue gained relevance: the relationship between the researcher and the objects. The researchers will develop a relationship with each company and with different representatives within the companies. These relationships need to be monitored and nurtured throughout the project. There will be different levels of proximity and trust, which will be determinant for the quality of information and access. The industry is characterized by lack of academic research and a low density of employees with an academic background. It also faces pressure for survival, which added to the lack of trust among them and their pragmatic expectations, triggered the importance to set up a research framework in order to pave the most favourable conditions for data collection already from the early start of the project.

Here we already observe two different kinds of expectations, both related to the concept of trust – one dealing with behavioural expectations between the researchers and the research objects, and the other one focusing on the outcome of the project in terms of academic and pragmatic expectations. Regarding the first type of expectation, some information gathered by the researchers need to be validated through secondary data at some point. Due to research procedures, the researchers must be critical towards the data and it may be interpreted as lack of trust. On the other hand, the access to data is only possible if the companies trust the researchers. The outcome-related expectations can be understood as motivation drivers, both for the researchers and the research objects. The fact that the companies partly finance the project naturally reinforce that they expect value for their money invested, as literally expressed by many of them. However, their interpretation of value is directly associated to their individual survival.

Asymmetries are clearly present in this research relationship through timeframe, objectives, expectations, knowledge of business and communication. These differences can be associated to what Nooteboom (1999, 2000, Nooteboom et al. 2005) described as cognitive distance. Academics and practitioners interpret, understand and evaluate the world differently and consequently researchers have to be able to first describe the practitioners' world, before any attempt of understanding it, in order to reduce the cognitive distance. Thus, due to the high level of tacit knowledge involved, the information can only be attained through personal interviews based on the cooperation between the researchers and the research objects. Many authors have stressed the importance of trust for cooperation (Axelrod 1984; Morgan and Hunt 1994). And therefore, we take a deeper look at this concept as an important element in the research relationship. Even though, trust is confirmed and strengthened, surprisingly enough, as an unintended side effect of the same processes when they proceed successfully (Bordum 2005, p.9), we find it too relevant to take it for granted and leave it to fate.

Trust in research relationships

Trust is a concept that has been studied from the most various angles. Hosmer (1995) attempted to bring together two areas that have studied trust, namely organizational theory and moral philosophy, and he reviewed the definitions of trust applied in the different contexts of individual expectations, interpersonal relationships, economic exchanges, social structures and ethical principals, of which the first four are of interest in this study.

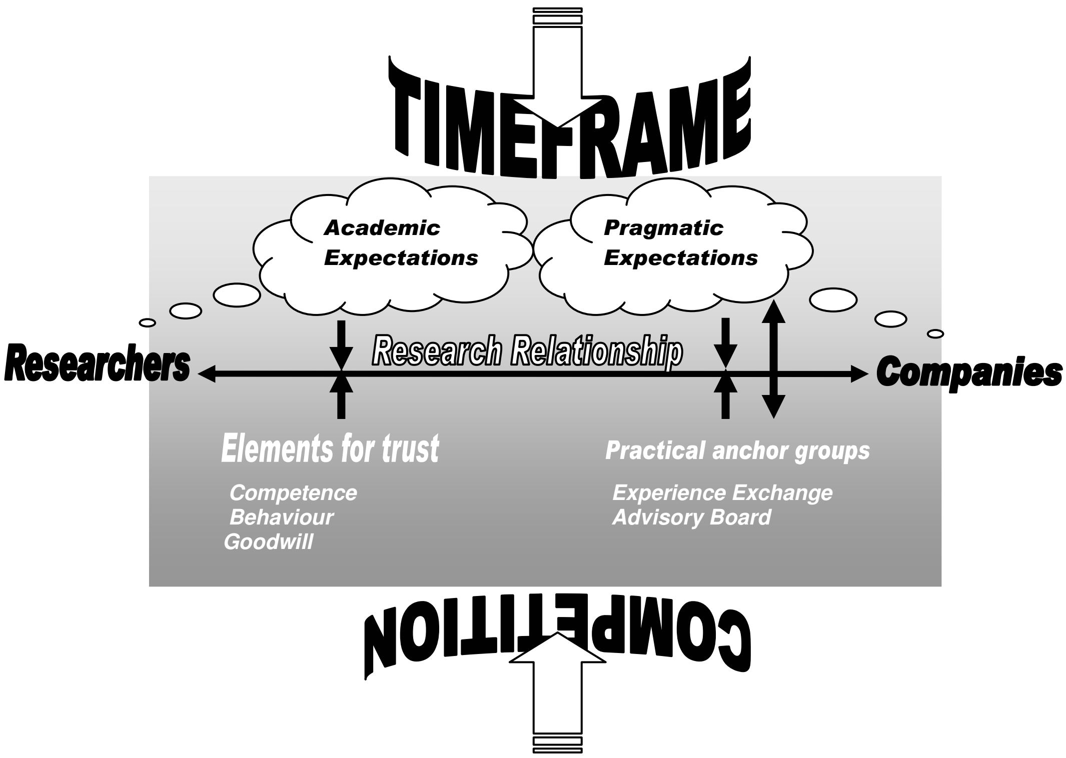
In order to avoid confusion it is important to explain how trust is defined in the context of this research relationship. Although it is possible to identify elements of individual expectations (Deustch 1958, Zand 1972, Golibiewski and McConkie 1975, Barber 1983) and interpersonal relations (Rotter 1967, Michalos 1990, Gambetta 1988, Carnevalle, Pruitt and Carrington 1982, Meeker 1983, Butler and Cantrell 1984, Rempel and Holmes 1986, Ring and Van de Ven 1992) as contexts for defining trust, the first lacks mutuality and the latter the embeddedness, while the context of economic transaction (Williamson 1975, Freeman 1984, Hill 1990, Friedland 1990) presupposes distrust as a starting point, and therefore brings another concept to the discussion, which has no relevance in this context as the companies already signed a contract. However, social structures go beyond a dyadic relationship and introduce trust as a social construct (Coleman 1984), and is refined by Granovetter (1973, 1985) as he introduces the embeddedness of relationships. In his view, business firms and the networks, which they are part of, are socially and historically constructed. Therefore, trust is not a loose concept from time and space dimensions. Furthermore, Zucker (1986) instead of looking at an individual's expectations states that trust is a set of social expectations resulted from three sources: process based trust, person based trust and institutional based trust. We incline towards this latter concept but also believe it requires some adjustments in order to better suit the case of research relationships.

In this sense, reputation is an element of the process-based trust. However, the researchers are new in the area so the companies initially are required to rely on CAMS's or the professor's reputation, but with time the researchers will acquire a reputation of their own. Competence, the ability to bridge the gap of cognitive distance and common expectations are elements of the person based trust. But we find indispensable to introduce the behavioural aspect as well, as proposed by Butler and Cantrell (1984) and aligned with the findings of Moorman et al. (1993, p. 82), wherein " a subject that believes in the reliability of a partner, without demonstrating the willingness to effectively act in a coherent way, manifest an insufficient level of trust". Therefore personal characteristics like integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty and openness (Butler and Cantrell 1984) should not be taken for granted in research relationships. The contract signed by all the parties involved can be referred to the institutional based trust. Although it may have been the initiator for indication of trust in the research project, it is not enough to guarantee access to data.

In this process however, two challenges arise. One is the cognitive distance. The companies have the tacit knowledge and as researchers we would like to describe this knowledge as much as possible. However, it is a process dependent on time and on the existence of trust itself. The second challenge refers to the expectations as they are not alike, and take different directions: academic and pragmatic. Consequently, the second process, person base, gains relevance as it takes into account the on-going interaction between researchers and the companies in order to obtain the quality and level of information required and it but should not be extracted from its context from which the pressures and incentives for the research arise. As follows, the embeddeness of the research relationship is also relevant. Moreover, it makes more sense to determine the level of trust required for this project instead of duelling with a precise definition of the concept. Therefore, the trust required in this research relationship is the one that enables a pleasant environment based on process and person based trust, despite initial cognitive distance and diverse expected outcomes, for receiving information, sharing and learning from it.

In Figure 2, the scene is set for identifying the elements required to manage the conditions for trust in this research relationship. There are external factors that constantly put pressure on the trust elements of the relationship: the timeframe of the PhD project and the competition. There are also internal factors, based on personal characteristics that will be nurturing the research relationship.

Figure 2 - A Research Framework for Research Relationship



External factors

Timeframe

The timeframe for the study is three years, but at the same time the research environment is characterized by an industry with serious problems right now. The number of companies is rapidly declining, and a significant motivation for the companies to sign up for the project was the fact that something extraordinary must happen, if the industry is to re-cover and maintain its competitiveness in the future. As the companies are struggling for their existence, the time scope of three years might turn out to raise some extra frustrations, as they are anxious in receiving results right away. We have faced the time pressure in several occasions when visiting the companies. “We expect you to hand out your results next month, it can not be that difficult”, and remarks like that are not unheard, which indicates that the companies feel as if they are running out time. Furthermore, some people in the industry believe that this project started too late. The problems they are dealing with were already identified in the 1980’s (Møller and Pade, 1988), and some of them continue to be relevant today. This may be their last call for understanding what has happened and what are the options from now on.

The question of time would certainly have a different role, if the environment the companies were operating in had been more prosperous. It would ease many of the tensions attached to the research situation, but it would also lose some of its dynamic aspects.

Competition

We have to bear in mind that these companies used to be and still are each other's worst competitors. The fact that they raised their hands one by one to sign up for a joint project does not automatically mean that they suddenly from one day to another have started to work as a team. This event can be described as an unexpected force that has made them change their behaviour, and it can be considered as an ignition for cooperation.

The confidentiality required between the researcher and each of the companies should be a given, but instead is under constant pressure due to the competition factor. Mainly because they are all very interested in finding out what each other is doing. So even though they ask for confidentiality, they want us to break it for their individual advantage. It is an aspect that has to be monitored all the time throughout the interviews by the researchers. This may point to a possibility of free riding actors. That is, those who would like the benefits without a contribution.

Internal factors

Expectations

In this paper we are concentrating on the relationship between the researchers and the companies. The central factor in this context is the asymmetry of objectives and expectations, not only between the researchers and the companies, but definitely also between the different companies. One can say that we, as researchers, have our academic expectation to obtain the PhD-degree and we are facing eight different and more pragmatic expectations. Moreover, it is important to determine a research question that corresponds to the companies' expectations to give legitimacy to the project.

The fact that those pragmatic expectations as a whole will not be fulfilled with the PhD project we know before hand. However, a certain alignment may be achieved if we find the area of commonalities in expectations through the research questions. These questions will be found interactively with the companies. In this sense, the academic and pragmatic expectations are partially fulfilled. As the interaction continues it is possible that expectations from the companies become with time, more aligned to the reality of a PhD project. It may trigger a learning process for the companies as well. Or not.

Elements for trust

The bases for trust in this research relationship consist of two basic elements, namely the practical anchors in form of experience exchange and advisory board groups, and personal trust elements (competences, goodwill and behaviour) that the researchers must consider in order to nourish trust.

Experience exchange and advisory board groups can also be considered as check-points for companies' expectations, and they are important milestones in this process. In the trust literature (e.g. Thyssen 2001) it is often cited that the presence of trust decreases the need for control, but we believe that the pressure from external factors enhances the need for these check-points to breed the trust, both towards the researchers, but what is even more important, among themselves. In this context, an interactive process throughout the meetings will be nourishing the expectations domain, and consequently the research relationship.

At the same time researchers' competences, goodwill and behaviour are necessary both in inter-organizational and inter-personal relationships. Moorman et al. (1993) divide competences in research and non-research abilities and motivation. They argue that expertise is a key factor affecting trust, and hence researcher's ability to plan and implement research activities is in a crucial position. Blomqvist and Ståhle (2001) classify competence into technological, economic and partnering competencies and stress out the importance of professionalism and inter-personal skills on the individual level. In this context, we underline that even though technical knowledge of the pine furniture industry will help, it is even more important to learn from the observations, be able to interpret data and communicate results into their language. This will enforce our credibility as researchers in this industry.

Regarding the behavioural aspect Moorman et al. (1993) found out in their research project that such non-research capabilities and motivations as researcher's perceived integrity, i.e. the ability to maintain objectivity throughout the research project is the most important predictor of trust. In some contexts the importance of information and communication is emphasised and meaning that relevant information should be provided promptly and on a regular basis. Blomqvist and Ståhle (2001) consider behaviour as interaction based on cognition and experience. Our interpretation of this behavioural element is that the researchers have to be *proactive* in their communication and take the main responsibility on that. Moreover, *the enthusiasm and a positive attitude* should not be taken for granted when studying in such a gloomy and tense environment.

When talking about goodwill, it can be defined according to Blomqvist and Ståhle (2001) to be "moral responsibility and positive intentions toward the other". We believe that the goodwill needed in this project is connected with the interactive nature of the research as we are researching *together* with the companies, not only *in* the companies. In this kind of research the science is approaching the everyday life, and the researchers have to demonstrate good intentions in dealing with expectations, especially when they are so divergent. Confidentiality issues must also be respected and kept under constant surveillance due to the contradictory behaviour of these companies.

In order to tackle the research relationship in practice we actually started on the field work and later on we found out that our reflections and needs had the support from theory. As the work progressed we found of a greater relevance to be more conscious of the expectations in the research relationship and its influence on the information flow in practice.

Research relationship in practice

Based on the framework described above, the elements for sustaining trust have been put to practice through the set up of experience exchange groups, advisory board group and considerations for company visits, conversations, and questioning, as these have been the main activities so far in the research relationship.

Experience exchange and advisory board groups

The experience exchange groups is a forum for discussion and learning, where somewhat the daily pressure they experience can be shared among the other players. It is an arena to work on topics less relevant for our research. Through these meetings we hope that the more pragmatic short-term expectations related to the project will be fulfilled. The meetings will be also deployed by the researchers as a touch base to the managers' espoused needs. As explained before, it is important to find the area in which academic research and pragmatic expectations will meet and the topics that arise from the group meetings should indicate the main problems that need to be addressed.

These groups will meet 4 times a year. The participants must be relevant representatives of these activities in the companies, and in order to allow continuity it should always be the same person in every meeting. As they also need to know each other better, the meetings will be held each time in a different company that will be the host for the day. By entering into each other territory they may find some base for communication, and pave the way for a better relationship. However, the most urgent aid for these companies lies in the process of these interactive meetings, even though they may not be aware of it right away.

One should note that there will be no attempt to change the expectations of these managers. As the expectations of researchers and companies are completely different, that attempt would be born to fail. Thus, the group will function as an important tool for expectation management, in the sense that it should keep managers motivated and willing to share their experiences with the researchers, but other outcomes may arise. Also those we have not been prepared for. In this sense, we should also be aware of signs to decode the managers' perception of the experience exchange group as fulfilling their expectations for the project. In case the attendance falls, and some managers repeatedly are not able to come to the meetings, we should re- evaluate the topics or call for a meeting with the advisory board group to understand what has been going on, and find a new way to put the meetings in the right track again before we start missing the information flow.

The advisory board group will work as a monitor of the research process. It will also make sure that the project is studying a relevant theme for the group. This group will meet twice a year and the participants are the main company representatives that signed the financial agreement. It will also provide another opportunity for discussion of their current anxieties and expose them to relevant topics for the industry.

The fact that we are dealing with a declining industry and companies that are each other's competitors may generate conflicts. In case there are problems in the relationship between researchers and companies, a neutral person, the director of UMT, is the contact that will mediate the crisis. Hopefully, there will be no need to use him, but the possibility is taken into account.

Company visits, observations, conversations and questioning

In order to keep the initial trust initiated by Prof. Hedaa, we have taken a few conscious steps that have shown to be important elements for the process of trust:

- The confidentiality issue is experienced on a daily basis. To illustrate it, many companies have not been willing to disclose the names of their suppliers in fear that the list would reach the hands of their competitors, and give them the chance to negotiate better prices. Even though, again and again we have reassured them that the information is for our internal understanding. One company has drawn a confidentiality contract, but we have not deepened the study into sensitive areas yet in order to evaluate if signing such contracts has been enough to have access to the data, or if it has just been a sign of distrust from the start.

- In this 3-year project we will avoid the hit-and-run posture. Actually, it was drawn in the contract that researchers would be half of the period doing field work. We aim to visit each company on a regular basis, i.e. once a month, and as the interviews take place with different employees of the company, we found relevant, whenever possible, to be seen by the main contact in the company. This will help to give an idea of the frequency of our visits and whenever possible have personal update on the project.

- During the interviews we have taken into account the companies' structure and size, as well, employees' personality and background, if we know it before hand. This has been reflected in the way the interview is conducted, through questions, listening posture and language used.

- The researchers are not allowed to have a bad day when working in the field, as it has a direct effect on the quality of the interview. One day we visited a small subcontractor who had been difficult to deal with in the first round of interviews. We were afraid that we would not be able to go deep enough due to lack of response from him. On the way to the interview we decided to behave in a very positive way, and see what would come out of that. When the meeting started the interviewee could feel that we had learnt many industry-related issues and the combination of our positive behaviour and knowledge made him relax. It resulted in a rich interview with a lot of story-telling – histories that went far beyond the politically correct answers.

At this time, we are setting the stones to pave the way to ensure the information flow in the research relationship. We do not know if all of these measures will work accordingly. Some may give the expected effect, and others may hinder the process. However, we believe that just being aware of these issues has already shown positive indications that we are in the right track.

Conclusion

There are clearly some areas of divergence in this research relationship which have lead us to tackle it in a more structured way, as shown on the table below:

Table 1 - Asymmetries in research relationships

Asymmetries	*Companies*	*Researchers*
Timeframe	As soon as possible	3 years
Objectives	A prescription (know-how)	An understanding (know-why)
Expectations	Pragmatic	Academic
Level of abstraction	Too low	Too high
Knowledge of business	Tacit	Theoretical
Communication	"Pine furniture" vocabulary	Academic vocabulary

The set of asymmetries presented is a result of the initial observations. As the interactions increase not only new sets may arise, but previous ones may change their character and become more aligned, decreasing the cognitive distance for example. This is the early stage of a process, from which the experience so far has confirmed the complexity of the research relationship.

There has been progress through company visits. The closeness to the companies has been improving, although we are not talking to the same person in the company, it is possible to observe an increasing interest for the project as we permeate the different levels in the organization. As far as openness is concerned, some companies have denied access to information while others have been quite co-operative. Some that have not disclosed a particular piece of information one day suddenly have offered it on a later date.

Still, the pressure from timeframe and the competition among them could be clearly observed in the two meetings with the groups we had so far. The first meeting of the advisory board group was a positive experience. For the first 5 minutes we were worried as silence and distance dominated the room. However, after showing our first observations from the 29 meetings in 2 months of work, we could observe a higher level of interaction, and confirm that our observations so far, not only were valid, but relevant for the industry. Some of the participants already jumped into the implementation of possible solutions for the industry, like the set up of a joint sales firm, illustrating how eager they are to find a way out. It is interesting to point out, though, that some companies tried a similar attempt in the industry for 3 years ago and failed. None of them mentioned it, despite their knowledge of it. Openness is not there yet.

The first experience exchange meeting was intentionally set up in order to attend some of our needs as researchers. We decided to make one meeting for the two experience exchange groups (purchasing and sales) in order to give more confidence to the researchers to carry out the meeting, and to introduce all the members. The location was at CAMS, so they also could visualize where we come from. The theme chosen was the Development of the Danish Furniture Industry, with a workshop to start pinpointing the problems they face. We believed it could already give us some hints that could lead towards the research questions. However, these managers were not able to open up yet, despite the fact that they emphasized the importance of co-operation among each other. When they were informed that the next meetings would take place in each company, with a presentation of themselves, it was difficult to find the first volunteer. Either they preach one thing but are not able to act on it, or their concept of co-operation is not the same as we understand it.

We believe it is a learning process for them and for us. Hopefully, this initial attention given to the research relationship will allow us to reap better results in the future. But we will only be able to evaluate its usefulness, later on, when we look back. Meanwhile, we will keep the efforts in addressing the elements of trust in the research relationship throughout the project in an attempt to make it easier to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Further research

We are convinced that it is important to regard this research relationship as an on-going investigation. We hope that by taking note of the challenges as they come along it will make it easier to later on describe a methodology chapter that is aligned and truthful with the inductive nature of the research. Moreover, it will also be a learning tool to have an overview of our interpretation of the challenges at different times, besides serving as reference for other inductive studies with companies without tradition for academic research.

Another interesting aspect to investigate would be the relationship load of researchers in inductive projects as they act as catalysts to both worlds: academic and empirical. The asymmetries are evident and many times hard to overcome as a result of the embeddedness of researchers and objects of study. In this sense, distinct issues arise. For example, the issues we face are quite distinct from those that are researching in biotechnology companies, which through time have already developed standard answers as they are constantly interviewed by researchers. It is therefore relevant to study the process of building and managing relationships from a researcher's point of view.

Research relationships as study area are somewhat uncovered and in our opinion it is worth paying more attention to. From the network research point of view personal interviews help to capture all relevant network features in sufficient detail, and the necessary information often lies in the hands of persons connected to the companies. It is difficult to acquire tacit knowledge in other ways than by conducting personal interviews, and that tacit knowledge can only be obtained through a trustful relationship between the researcher and the object.

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