

## **Weakening processes in business relationships**

Jaana Tähtinen  
Department of Marketing  
University of Oulu  
P.O.Box 4600  
FIN-90014 Oulu, Finland  
[Jaana.tahtinen@oulu.fi](mailto:Jaana.tahtinen@oulu.fi)  
Fax +358 8 553 2906  
Phone +358 8 553 2586

Ivan Snehota  
Università della Svizzera italiana  
Facoltà di Scienze della comunicazione  
via Giuseppe Buffi 13,  
6900 Lugano, Switzerland  
[ivan.snehota@lu.unisi.ch](mailto:ivan.snehota@lu.unisi.ch)  
Telefax: +41 91 912 46 47  
Phone: +41 91 912 47 65

### **Abstract**

In all relationships there are forces and processes that lead to strengthening or weakening of the relationship. However, the processes have not attracted researchers in equal manner. As a result, we lack a good overall picture of the weakening processes. The little that is known about them is related to “relationship ending”, where the antecedents and factors leading to the ending, the ending as a cognitive decision making process, and the communication strategies used during the ending process have been studied.

We argue that such an approach not very fruitful. Firstly, the nature of the relationship, i.e. the views of the actors concerning the duration of the relationship and their willingness to continue it into the future, is hypothesised in some relationship ending approaches as a determinant of the ending. However, the nature of a relationship is continuously changing as a consequence of relationship interaction and network effects. Moreover, other factors may reverse the nature’s influence on relationship ending. Secondly, the evolution (rather than development) of relationships is not linear as implicitly suggested, but an outcome of several forces, both external to the relationship and internal to the interaction processes within the relationship.

With two cases, this study shows how a relationship can change its nature during its life. In addition, this study claims that the nature of the relationship is not the same for every actor. The perception of the actor guides its or her/his actions in the relationship. They are also continuously subject to influence of factors and events external to the relationship, mostly originating in the network. It is the actions that promote the change that can easily switch the direction of the relationship from weakening to strengthening (and vice versa).