

## **DEFINING CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG RELATIONSHIPS**

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## **DEFINING CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS AMONG RELATIONSHIPS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Markets as relationships and as networks is now an accepted view of how the context of interaction between organisations and other actors is governed. Perhaps because of this success, the narrow domain of the close relational dyad within the relational exchange set has been only partially defined and specified. The concept of close relationships may be deemed an ideal type and therefore difficult to define as a reification of what is a complex phenomenon. This paper reviews the literature on the definition of the close relationship and may provide a platform for the specification and development of the concept.

The word close relationship is used to describe an idealised form of interaction. In many studies it is assumed to be there without question. It is this highly specific structure that is revisited in this paper. The review is based on the three most common elements of previous definitions of relationships: long term orientation; trust and norms; and asset specificity. The main finding of the paper is that the close relation may be based on aspects of these three elements and remains not well specified and defined. The paper was completed on the basis of a review of key authors and journals including the *IMP*; *Journal of Marketing*; *JAMS*; *European Journal of Marketing*; *Strategic Management Journal*. The citations in table 1, from books and journals, represent a distillation of this review and demonstrate by whom and where contributions to the topic have been made.

### **DEFINITION IN THE LITERATURE**

#### **Open-ended definition**

Table 1 illustrates the many terms used to describe a close relationship. Nearly all articles use different terms. This can be attributed to the purpose of the articles which are focused on the aspect of the close relationship relevant to the author(s). For example, Ganesan (1994) uses long term orientation which is probably a component of a close relationship, and Barney and Hansen (1994) use strong form trust, an aspect that may be unique to close relationships. The author(s) are interested in the immediate relevance of the variables being assessed and in directly observable/measurable theory. Most authors

do not aim to authenticate close relationships as it is assumed they exist, and as with most constructs, it is an idealised form and as such a 2<sup>nd</sup> order variable not easy to isolate or measure. In terms of definitional clarity, a multiplicity of terms makes for theoretical contradiction, makes comparison arduous, and at worst, for total difference in meaning.

The term close relationship has been used in sociology and psychology to describe enduring, and unique bonds between individuals and groups. It avoids the tag of intimate relationship and the associated ‘marriage analogy’ and the reliance on a single characteristic such as a bilateral governance arrangement. The word close implies some distinctiveness and yet is not partial as would seem to be the case from the terms used in table 1, for example, high trust may exist without a rich exchange, or bilateral contracting represents a governance mode only, whilst partnership and relationship apply to so many exchanges as to make qualification a necessity.

### **Continuum and relativity**

Close relationships are often an accepted view of reality – relationship researchers work with them or some aspect of same without ever really defining them. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the positioning of a close relationship as the alternative to having none or to a transaction/discrete relationship. This is a mode often used to define close relationship and in introductory remarks in many papers. Perhaps this was propagated by Webster (1992) whose classic relationship continuum is often cited and always assumed. This view of relationships sees one move along a continuum of types. Rarely if ever are boundaries suggested for the movement between types. As a form of classification, defining something by polarity, is not ideal as assuming one thing doesn’t exist is no rationale for another being out there. In fact, close relationships can be the residual in such a comparison. That is all relationships, once not discrete, are close. It is far more likely that close relationships are so different as to exist in parallel not just too discrete relationships but to other types as well. Mudambi and Helper (1998) describe the classic adversarial relationship using the iconic context for it, the US auto industry, of which could be argued is different indeed to the close relationship. Indeed, to be fair to Webster’s continuum only the discrete category has limited relational aspects. All other types represent some form of relationship development right up to closing the loop with vertical integration. From a statistical point of view, the relativity implied in a continuum

might be useful especially in placing relationships into categories. Yet relativity has its conceptual highs and lows, its idea of contingency might be meritorious in a business context but impedes theory development through non-isolation of variables. This paper will aim to clarify the definition of the close relationship which may, as a second order concept, lead to a reevaluation of it vis-à-vis other types on the developmental continuum.

### **No specific theory**

Theory specifically developed for the close relation has yet to emerge. The close relationship has been addressed as a derivative of two main branches of theory – transaction cost economics and social exchange. Neither theory was developed to examine the close relational alone but have clearly influenced its development. The IMP took pieces of both to explain the relevance of close relationships in business-to-business markets and laterally networks but doesn't specifically theorize at this level (Håkansson 1982; Axelsson and Easton, 1992). Transaction cost economics, even through many iterations, views close relationships (from a governance perspective, bilateral) as a limited type favoured in certain conditions over vertical integration (unified governance) (Williamson 1975; 1979; 1985). Elements of close relationships have been found to exist more often than not in studies using a transaction cost framework even though the close relationship is a limited case! Social exchange, not developed for business (see, Blau, 1964), but developed by Macneil (1980) into business through his relational contracting theory, brought the notion of social context/embeddedness into the realm of relationships. This theory carves a space for relationships, they exist and can be durable and have certain unique characteristics not present in the case of other relationships, for example, the relational contract norms of role integrity, preservation, harmonisation of relational conflict, and supracontract. Unfortunately, social exchange is a generic theory for all relationships not just one for the idealised, or conceptually 2<sup>nd</sup> order, close relation. Social theorists rightly point to the fact that every contract is partially a relation – back to the attempt here to focus specifically on the particular, the close relationship.

Table 1 also presents the definition used by previous authors. If one accepts the prior commentary on the multiplicity of terms used to define close relationships then one might accept that the resultant definitions are partial at best. The authors cited in table 1 are the

closest this author found to using the close relationship with a few additional citations added to serve as contrasts to how wide the relationship net can be cast, see, Morgan and Hunt (1994) for an example of a wide application to the entire field of relationship marketing based on trust and commitment as key mediating variables. The definitions cluster around three core elements of relationalism – long term orientation, trust and norms, and asset specificity. The rest of this paper will examine each of these elements and their particular application to close relationships. Indeed within these three elements could be the defining aspects of the close relation.

**TABLE 1**  
**DIFFERING TERMS AND DEFINITIONS FOR CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS**

Reference	Term	Definition of close relationship
Williamson (1979)	Obligational contracting	Non standard transactions of mixed asset specificity and frequent exchange
Ford (1980)	Close relationship	Long term committed, extensive social structure, institutionalised
Macneil (1980)	Relational contract	Particular norms intensified in relationships
Jackson (1985)	Lost for good	Account commitment with high switching costs
Ford, Håkansson and Johanson (1986)	Close relationship	Well-established, particularistic interaction capability
Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987)	Mutual motivational investment	Durable associations supported by shared goals, planning, and commitment to the relationship
Dyer and Singh (1988)	Idiosyncratic interfirm linkages	A firm's critical resources may span firm boundaries and may be embedded in interfirm routines and processes
Anderson and Narus (1990)	Working partnerships	Mutual recognition and understanding that the success of each firm depends in part on the other firm, with each firm consequently taking action so as to provide a coordinated effort focused on jointly satisfying the requirements of the customer marketplace
Ring and Van de Ven (1992)	Relational contract	Long term investment based on recurrent bargaining among legally equal and autonomous parties. Highly specified investments that cannot be fully specified or controlled in advance
Sako (1992)	Obligational contractual Relations	Long-term horizons, heavy interdependence, and goodwill trust
Webster (1992)	Mutual, total dependent buyer-seller partnership	Long-term, mutually supportive relationships based on reciprocity with

		stability as key outcome
Barney and Hansen (1994)	Strong form trust	Principles and standards to guide behaviour regardless of exchange vulnerabilities
Ganesan (1994)	Long term relationship	Long term orientation – perceptions of interdependence of outcomes in which both parties' individual and joint outcomes are expected to benefit
Heide (1994)	Bilateral governance	Unique entry, maintenance and are open-ended
Husted (1994)	High trust cooperation	Long term commitments that are indefinite and diffuse
Kanter (1994)	Collaborative advantage	Mutual agreement to combine together; value chain partnership
Morgan and Hunt (1994)	Relationship marketing	Establishing, developing and maintaining successful relationships
Håkansson and Snehota (1995)	Team/quasi organization	Thicker actor, activity, resource patterns
Zaheer and Venkatraman (1995)	Relational governance	Interfirm exchanges which include significant relationship-specific assets combined with a high level of interorganisational trust
Mudambi and Helper (1998)	Close but adversarial	Formal enforceable commitment relying on strong legal institutions
Cannon and Perrault (1999)	Relationship connectors	Dimensions that reflect the behaviour and expectations in a particular buyer-seller relationship
Lorenzoni and Lipparini (1999)	Partnership	Relational capability – ability to interact and share knowledge with other companies
Lambe, Spekman And Hunt (2000)	Interimistic relationship	Close, collaborative, fast-developing, short-lived
Izquierdo and Cillán (2004)	Relational-oriented exchanges	Relational norms and ethical principles as a means of control and coordination

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## LONG-TERM ORIENTATION

The finding that relationships last was an important underpinning in the move to relationship approaches. The IMP group used this finding to question the markets as transaction assumption inherent in much economic theory as applied to business before its formation. Indeed, it has been accepted that all relationship may last even those on the transaction-side. Relationship length or duration is no longer a good predictor of type.

Ganesan (1994) expanded the temporal idea to include both desire and utility combining the notion of expectation of continuity (Noordweier, John and Nevin, 1990) with parties' outcomes been perceived as being better in the long run (Kelley and Thibaut, 1978). Both of these aspects of long-term orientation along with its potential philosophic meaning will be assessed in terms of defining close relations.

Being in a relationship for a long time might be a function of choice and networks. Finding duration as not a significant variable in this context might not be surprising. Business markets often offer limited choice and network ties and position limited scope. Even in consumer markets, the same conditions can apply – availability, geographic location, imperfect information, switching costs. Length of a relationship does not mean that it is close. Length of relationships is often paired with dependence. Dependence can be seen as forced while more interdependent relationships are chosen. Dependence is viewed as risk needing to be measured in the traditional economic approaches to exchange but from a relationship point of view interdependence is positive as it can maximize joint outcomes. The theoretical assumptions are different using a relational exchange perspective: the management of risk and the cost of transactions are not to the fore. The commitment of relationship specific assets will be assessed in a later section. Again it is the expectation of continuity that facilitates such investment; the view that what you invest will be returned to you over time.

Expectation alone is not fully relational and would have to be qualified by the caveat emptor principal – expectation doesn't mean you are any more committed or close to a range of customers and suppliers. Continuity may be there because there is little choice in markets rather than through choices made by parties in the relationship. Indeed, some organisations can come together in a project and have a short-term close relationship. In fact many modern organisational structural responses have an in-built partner orientation, for example, construction organisations that come together on a regular but intermittent basis to compete projects. Desire to remain together may not be enough for a close relationship. The partner orientation or utility aspect of orientation may offer more fruitful insights.

If time is expected in all relationships then the utility over time to maximize outcomes in an existing relationship may be a more refined element with which to define a close

relation. This utility element may have two 'assumed' dimensions – one the notion of choice (idea that this relationship has been chosen over others) and the second is specific – not available to all relations, to all dyads, or to every other relationship that the particular firm has. The concept of utility as commonly understood may not adequately capture the autonomous and specific nature of this explanation but if it can be stretched to do so removes the idea of being stuck in a relationship and that the relationship is specific not a relation among relationships. If one combines the utility to remain with a specific partner who has other choices with a focus on a limited aspect of desire that is a focus on not just your own future goals and outcomes in a relationship but also those of the partner another element of the uniqueness of a close relationship emerges. However, orientation to joint outcomes is a big ask in practice and may be more limited than thought. It is assumed to balance in the long term, maybe even by self-interest maximization of one's own outcome and a nod to the partner. Clearly, in a close relation it is joint goals and outcomes. These can be negotiated and actioned on a continual basis and may not be as time dependent as thought. From an evaluation point of view, it is easy to check a box indicating commitment to sharing goals and outcomes over time rather than doing it now. Dwyer, Schurr and Oh's (1987) motivational investment may be a high barrier to cross, in practice something observed but rarely delivered. The problem with a wide definition of long term orientation is that it applies to the many. We begin to further question the basis of the long term focus more on the desire (expectations of continuity) side of orientation especially when one compares orientation to marketing orientation or to the developing one of relationship orientation.

This aspect of orientation is that of philosophy of doing business or a party's predisposition to intense involvement with another (like autonomy and specific partners, orientation of this type is an assumed meaning not well developed). This ideological orientation separates itself from a more generalised time commitment and a limited commitment based on contextual or market variables. It is a culture to do business in a relational way. One would expect this to be found in all businesses who operate from a relational perspective. For close relationships this orientation must be towards a specific autonomous party rather than to all and it must be shared by the other partner. This philosophic orientation while in may indicate relationalism may not indicate close

relationships unless shared. There is little doubt that long term orientation is a surrogate for relationalism but it may not be an accurate indicator of a close relationship. Aspects of orientation: specific autonomous parties, commitment to partner goals over own interest, shared relational orientation, may be those that distinguish generic relationships from close.

## **TRUST AND NORMS**

Trust and norms are often mentioned in association with close relationships. Table 1 cites both of them as terms or part of the definition used by authors. This article will not attempt to get into the debate about the difference between trust and norms or which comes first. In the context of an embedded exchange they are closely related. Even items such as mutual expectations of reciprocity conform to the accepted idea of trust as being expectations that another party will act in a certain way. It is not the action but the belief that the other party will act in a certain way. The norm of role integrity also fits partially with the idea of competence trust as the expected ability to perform roles. However, integrity implies a higher level commitment based on another layer of principles.

Trust is a massively researched variable making the use of the term and meaning complex (see, Kromer, 2006, for a recent edited review of organisational trust). Given its pedigree in virtually all social sciences including business its lineage alone speaks volumes. As soon as organisations were viewed in a social way trust became a central force in explaining organisational behaviour (Lewis and Weigert, 1985; Zaheer and Venkatraman, 1995). Equally powerful has trust been in the relational literature that has been researched as a key mediating variable by Morgan and Hunt (1994).

There is only limited agreement as to what represents trust in relationships, see, Doney and Cannon, 1997; Sako, 1993; Hosmer, 1995. In parallel to relational contracting one could argue that there is trust in all relationships as there are relational elements in nearly all contracts. This may explain the prevalence of trust as a finding in the literature – hard to ignore as it is always present. Therefore, if trust is important to close relationships then it is a specified form rather than the generalised expectation of trusting behaviour in

all relationships. It is some form of social trust evident perhaps at both, and between both, the individual and interorganisational levels.

Trust from a risk of contracting perspective can be seen as an economic calculus. In transaction cost economics it is worthy of a risk assessment and a judgement based on this. Trust is an inherent risk of transacting and exposes vulnerability to others which can be calculated. Obviously, at higher levels of exposure the cost of doing business in this way is restrictive. The trust as reliance on others' behaviour is a widely used perspective but may be overplayed if one accepts the relational view as aspects of trust are present in many relationships. Reputation to carry out a task competently, and to complete a contract are two elements of this trust as indeed is the expectation of some amount of responsiveness in the case where there is a problem. This help when things do not go right is a risk of doing business and is part of winning and loosing, or an expectation that it will be put right (more a relational-based view). It is likely that these forms of trust are a minimum in all relationships.

Goodwill trust brings us into the more specific relational domain of trust. Sometimes goodwill trust is viewed as another party not taking actions that damage or being confident that one's vulnerability won't be abused. This is almost a negative view of goodwill albeit one that is useful for certain types of relationship. In close relationship goodwill is part of the make up. It is embedded in the partners – a relationship reality. It may be the starting point for such relationships and therefore could be seen as the context in which close takes place. So what elements are unique to the definition of close relationships? Trust of this type has a reference point at both a personal and organisational level. In close relationships it is likely to be institutionalised as well as personal. Otherwise it would be difficult for close, quick forming, relationships to happen. They would require huge time to build up. Quick forming close relationship partners can recognise the trustworthiness of others through signals and early dialogue or early actionable tests of commitment. It is very clearly illustrated in the context of joint innovation where investments can happen fast and parties will require fairly significant responses to problems right away. Given that close relationships may only be required by few then the use and isolation of aspects of goodwill enshrined in moral action and principles may not have needed definition to date.

Barney and Hansen (1994) in their notion of strong form or hard core trustworthiness pin their definition to principle and standards of right action. Their trust is exogenous reflecting on a partner's culture, history, values and people. Critically, for it to work in practice it must have a partner – it is particular for their competitive advantage to generate returns. Close relations require more than one and also require a hard core trust bound up in culture, values and people for it to be enacted. If it is not there, parties working together may have a near close relation but will have a reserve in place to guard against a major risk being exposed.

Close relations are defined in part by the presence of strong trust of the extreme social embeddedness kind. In the entrepreneurial or smaller organisation, this trust is at the individual level but in larger organisations, the organisational influences writ large and at least condition individual responses even in those individuals who would not be predisposed to strong trust. Close relationship trust should survive, case studies would show this, major shocks and conflicts that would bring most relationships down, for example, an ongoing problem that leads to a huge stock write off. This problem could be addressed by exit or at least by partially increasing alternatives over time. In close relationships, it could lead to further closeness as it confirms the parties' commitment and resolve to each other to solve the problem come what may. Problems are treated as part of the ongoing relationships – the resolutions of disputes is treated as a process of joint problem solving. Perhaps a reader might think of organisations that he/she trusts – it may be very few if any, especially, at this level. This might demonstrate the peculiarity of such trust. Part of the close relationship's ability to survive shocks comes through its intense communication patterns. Within this system, aspects of information exchange in close relationships would include the quality and nature of information sharing (would include proprietary information) and the joint participation in decision making. The communication system is an open system both at a personal and organisational level.

If we return to norms and to their creator in a contracting sense, Macneil (1980) and stick to that 1980 original for the basis of exposition as there has been many updates. Much of this article to date posits that close relationships have intensified aspects of relationships which make them unique. This is Macneil's view of the isolating relationship norms. Most of his norms are present in an exchange but the relational norms he identifies are

role integrity, preservation of the relation, harmonisation of relational conflict and supracontract.

As alluded to at the beginning of this section role integrity is closely allied to competence trust. It is a minimum relational expectation in business. As it intensifies it becomes the social unit implied in strong form trust. Preservation of the relation or protecting the relationship into the future is well covered in the long term orientation section and further fine tuned there. Harmonisation of relational conflict – a good example of a close relationship’s ability to harmonise conflict was outlined earlier. This norm becomes more difficult to generalise when we are talking about multiple overlapping relationships. In terms of the close relationship, the capacity to handle conflict and change is immense. The protection the relationship affords facilitates this process. This capacity is not well researched to date but certainly it and its converse, the ability to be innovative would be interesting to research. In reference to supracontract norms the notion is analogous to strong form trust although the word contract does not suit the close relation. Macneil (p. 70) places the understanding of supracontract norms beyond the contract lawyer and indeed suggests a contract lawyer must become something else “...anthropologists, sociologists, economists, political theorists, and philosophers to do reasonable justice to issues raised by contractual relations.” Close relationships as intensified have norms all to themselves and represent a subculture. The close relation that emerges from a review of trust and norms is again particularistic – able to absorb conflict and handle crises through a unique bonding quotient – its very own community.

### **ASSET SPECIFICITY**

Asset specificity, investing unique assets in a relationship, was developed in transaction cost economics and has been found significant in major studies on relationship governance (see, for example, from Table 1, Williamson, 1979; Dyer and Singh, 1988; Zaheer and Venkatraman, 1995; Lorenzoni and Lipparini, 1999). The nature of an asset has changed from being structurally defined to being defined by both structure and process. The traditional specific assets were those of site, human and physical capital but those have also been complemented by interfirm knowledge routines, procedures and process and complementary resources and capabilities. The latter asset types are

emerging from insights gained from resource theory and learning theory being applied to relationships. The underlying factor in describing an asset is that it is an investment or a specific commitment in a partner. The economic allocation argument of assessing these investments in terms of switching costs, duration to payback and potential to safeguard are well made for many transactions but not for close relationships. Trying to create interdependencies through creating switching costs if not wanted will not work or will create further imbalance in a relationship. Duration to payback is there in many relationships as they seem to last in a variety of forms for a very long time. In most cases, both parties will be conscious of the need to ensure return. In the case of investing in a plant to be near a customer, this may be quite risky in a lower trust scenario but in practice even in this case few alternatives may be available to the supplier. An investment of this type can be made on the basis of a long history of association and predictability that may be termed a working partnership but not necessarily a close one. When a relationship is assessed using a transaction cost criteria it is at a point in time, the value of an asset can change in a relationship. Putting safeguards in place to protect investments seems sensible but in practice may only be possible at a point in time, for example, a slightly longer guaranteed contract, systems integration raising the bar for an out supplier. One important sanction in the case of large investments can be institutional. The nature of investment in specific assets can be set out clearly and a return guaranteed in a contract. Protecting risk in this way is near to market governance. Often in transaction cost economics asset specificity is pre-cursored by the word idiosyncratic yet such investments are common place in close relationships. In addition, under transaction cost economics the more specific the asset the more likely the firm will use unified governance structures. This implication might be broken quite a bit in close relationships. This is where theory specific to close relationship could be developed.

The major benefit and defining characteristic of a close relationship is the ability to use and develop customised assets unique to the relationships. These may be observable such as in specific site, physical or human capital (for example, employees based in customer's plant). It is this author's view that many of these assets are part of doing many relationships and can be found across many types although it is likely the more customised investment and adaptations made the more likely a relation is close. By this

is meant both partners customising rather than one that is more likely to be forced. Where both partners make specific asset commitments, the asset created is often embedded in unique routines and process and enabled through specific relational knowledge (Madhok and Tallman, 1998; Johnson, Sohi and Grewal, 2004). It is not often fully controllable or specified in advance as it can emerge from the interaction. This is the overlap of close relationships: usually, highly asset specific investments are made but are also less observable due to the nature of the relationship. These unique exchange patterns are outside the rational assessment of firms who decide to come together to exploit complementary skills although this could arise in a close relationship and whether it would be more successful emerging from such a platform is a point for debate given the low success rate of alliances.

The types of investments and adaptations made in relationships have been well described in the literature (Hallén, Johanson and Seyed-Mohamed, 1992; Brennan, Turnbull and Wilson, 2003; Subramani and Venkatraman, 2003). Where there are some gaps is in connection to specific types such as the close relation. A general observation is that there is more investments and adaptations in the close relation than across all other types. In addition, the way investments and adaptations are made through learning routines and capability building will when applied to close relations add to existing theory foundations on the asset specific processes and structures needed to develop and maintain ongoing relationships.

## **CONCLUSION**

The analysis provided in this article represents the first step towards a more precise definition of the close relation than the continuum or dichotomous ones often found in the literature. Three definitional aspects were explored in the paper – long-term orientation, trust and norms, and asset specificity. All three apply to all relationships but in terms of the analysis here it would seem appropriate to borrow the notion of specific and autonomous parties from long-term orientation, dyadic strong form trust represented as a sub culture from trust and norms, and intense and idiosyncratic assets of both a structural and process nature from asset specificity. The items that differentiate the close

relationship from others can be developed into a definition of the form with the caveat inherent in trying to define at a conceptual level.

The examination in this paper has an appeal to consumer relationships in that it avoids the 'marriage' analogy and the overemphasis on interpersonal relationships of the more 'intimate' kind. Although like the SME relationship being with the owner, the consumer relationship is mainly with the individual. Consumer research has indicated the potential for consumers to have intense relationships with brands and to influence this relationship through the brand personality (Fournier, 1998; Bengtsson, 2003). Examples of potential close relationships in the consumer-brand sphere are multifold including those of user groups, fans, brand sophisticate, brand as extension of lifestyle, co-created user-company brand, internet interactive brand. The difficulty with engaging in the same criteria for business-to-business and business-to-consumer is equity. The whole notion of brands is about management and in such a context how can a consumer have equality? Yet this very issue is now at the heart of how consumer's voice is heard in companies, the nature of marketing to manage, and in new challenges in areas such as in eco-marketing and citizens-public service marketing. Insights from the close business-to-business relationship might provide some parameters for building the active, and in some cases, close consumer-brand (company/organisation) interactive relationship. Much extant literature wonders at the consumer's ability to hold such relationship but perhaps we should assess the ability of the company to do same?

The three aspects of previous definitions examined in this paper also provide a benchmark for examining the dynamic features of close relationships. If this was possible to complete then a theory of close relationships could emerge. The features are the workings of close relationships that are intensified in this form and unique in it. The problem solving nature of the close relationship, especially in responding to change and crisis, along with its sophisticated communication patterns and behaviour were mentioned. Further delineation of each of these is possible. The innovative and creative aspects of the close relationship have been alluded to here but not developed (these dynamic features are not developed in the literature either). Heide's (1994) dimensions of initiation, maintenance and termination of relationships have yet to be mapped at the process level. Within the coverage of asset specificity reference was made to process-

based assets unique in the routines and processes of the parties to the close relationship. The development of knowledge, sharing of resources, investment and adaptation patterns and transfer mechanisms in close relationships provide another rich vein for examination of the features of the form. It is hoped that this paper marks a commencement of the debate and objective of a definition and perhaps a codification of what we know that might advance the cause of theory development around the close relation.

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