

Different reasons why dissatisfied customers stay with their supplier.

Long-term customer – supplier relationships, have been widely studied in industrial marketing literature since nearly 30 years. The understanding and explanation of the mechanisms of loyalty as well as behavioural and attitudinal variables which describe and explain it have, indeed, a central place in the industrial literature.

The majority of these researches concentrate, however, on the cases where everything is going well between the two parts. Researches generally study situations where customer and supplier share an overall positive relationship, balanced and without incident. Quite all the works are interested in satisfied customers (with more or less strong degrees) with their relationship with the supplier. On the basis of this satisfaction, trust, attachment, commitment, involvement, etc., can, then, develop and strengthen the relationship. However, the difficulties, the problems and more widely the sources of dissatisfaction for the industrial customer, are also a part of the reality of the relationships, including for long-term ones.

Consequently, the object of this article is precisely to study the case of these long-term relationships on the occasion of which a problem occurs. The customer is then dissatisfied, in a more or less deep way, according to the nature and of the recurring character of this problem. Two reactions are then possible: some customers change their supplier and others stay with the same supplier. We will focus on this second category of customers: those who stay whereas they are dissatisfied.

The question is then the following: why do dissatisfied customers continue a long-term relationship with their supplier?

To bring elements of answer to this question, we first carried out a literature review based on customer - supplier relationship, loyalty, dissatisfaction and switching behaviour. This literature review enabled us to highlight three kinds of reasons which make a customer remain with his supplier in spite of a dissatisfaction: positive reasons, negative reasons and bad reasons (neither positive nor negative).

At the conclusion of this review of literature, we set up a qualitative study with representatives of 15 industrial customers. We wanted to propose a first empirical validation to our conclusions. The objective of this study was to confront the experience of these companies with our proposal, in order to validate or modify it according to the results. We also wanted to investigate complementary developments to this research, in particular for a future quantitative study.

Long term relationships on business to business markets

1. Long term relationships are important...

It was highlighted since the first researches of the interactive stream (Hakansson 1982) that customer - supplier relationships in industrial environment are very largely directed towards long-term relationships. The suppliers find a commercial and financial interest in long-lasting relationships. Indeed, dealing with a customer you already know is easier from a commercial point of view since you are familiar with its constraints, practices, etc. Consequently, it is also less expensive because the time needed to prospect, as well as negotiation, preparation and risk of error are reduced, which reduces the overall transaction costs (Dyer 1997, Dyer and Shu 2003). Therefore a positive link between the duration of the relationship and the profitability of the customer exists for the supplier (Rauyruen and Miller 2007, Reichheld 1996, Storbacka and al.1994).

As far as they are concerned, the customers also generally have an interest in developing long-term relationships. Indeed, with this kind of relationships they can reduce uncertainty or risk, simplify their processes or satisfy their own customers.

According to the existing literature, long-term relationships seem, then, to have strategic and operational advantages for the two parts. Customers and suppliers may really find valuable to develop and maintain this kind of relationship. It is what suggests relationship marketing research since the first works of Grönroos (1994). It should not, however, be forgotten that the point of view of relationship marketing is to consider that all the relationships are not equal. This process is valid for “best” opportunities. It would be, indeed, rather naive and basic to think that all the relationships are worth and beneficial. Therefore, Reinartz and Kumar (2000 and 2002) highlighted that a positive link between the length of the relationship and its profitability does not always exist. They also insist on the fact that some short-term relationships can be positive and even useful for the two parts. On the other hand, some long-term relationships are built on bad motivations and generate more problems than advantages.

It is, thus, necessary to make the difference between positive and beneficial long-term relationship for the two parts and durable relationship of less good -even of bad- quality.

2. ... but some are more important than others

Researches raising this aspect of the things have been progressively developing in relationship marketing literature. While working on the long-term relationships, some researchers have focused on “relational norms”, “relational orientation” or “relationism” of the customer (Gopalakrishna-Pillai and Sharma 2003). They are studied as means of detecting the most interesting and positive long-lasting relationships. These concepts recover common ideas related to the fact that some customers show a stronger propensity and motivation to be engaged in a relationship than others. An industrial customer will, thus, be more likely to develop a positive long-term relationship while demonstrating a particular flexibility and solidarity towards his supplier (Bello et al. 2002, Boyle et al.1992, Noordwier 1990).

In the same field of research, Kumar et al. (2003) introduce the concept of “relationship intention”. Their point of view is that a long term relationship is not always beneficial for the supplier according to the attitude of the customer. In the same way, it was shown that all the long-term relationships do not correspond to a real situation of customer loyalty. They can reflect an inertia or a dependence faced to the supplier (Bozzo 2001). In these two cases, the relationship is far from being beneficial for the two parts and its future stability is not guaranteed. Consequently, Kumar et al. define the relationship intention like: “an intention of a customer to build a relationship with a firm while buying a product or a service attributed to a firm, a brand, and a channel”. They describe the variable on five dimensions: involvement, expectations, forgivingness, feedback, fear of relationship loss. Forgivingness seems to be a very interesting concept for the measurement of relationship’s strength. It corresponds to the fact that “even if sometimes the expectations are not fulfilled, the customer will still give another chance to the firm, as the relationship is more important for the customer”. A customer able to forgive would show a strong involvement in the relationship, but also of a very strong loyalty with his supplier, a deep attachment, a great trust towards his supplier, etc.

Dissatisfaction in long term relationships

Although an important number of definitions of industrial customer satisfaction exists in the literature, the concept “is defined most frequently as a positive affective state resulting from the appraisal of all aspects of a firm’s working relationship with another firm” (Geyskens et al. 1999). It is generally admitted that satisfied customers buy more, re-buy more regularly and have positive word of mouth towards other present or potential customers. A great proportion of researchers and sales managers believe there is a direct link between a customer’s feeling of satisfaction and his willingness to continue the relationship (Anderson and Sullivan 1993, Eriksson et Vaghult 2000) or his loyalty (Dick et Basu 1994, Oliver 1999).

Satisfaction is, thus, a short-term evaluation based on long-term experiences (Ryu et al. 2007). It is, at the same time, strong -because it is built on past experiences- and fragile -because it is questioned at each new episode. Indeed, various sources of dissatisfaction exist for a customer in any kind of relationships, including long-term relationships. Each customer can experiment an error on behalf of his supplier, a disappointment, a crisis, etc.

Dissatisfaction has been, thus, often studied in the literature, in order to understand its mechanisms and consequences. Researches can be found in industrial, consumer and service fields.

In a research on consumer's behaviour after a problem with their service provider, Zeelenberg and Pieters (2004) identify 4 possible behaviours. Three of them result from past researches of Richins (1987), Oliver (1997) and Zeithaml and Al (1996). They consist of switching behaviour, complain behaviour and word of mouth. The authors add a fourth possible behaviour: inertia. Inertia corresponds in this research to the consumers who do not change their purchase behaviour after a dissatisfying episode. They, thus, do not change their supplier. On the other hand, they can complain and tell their story around them. In other words, as described in this research inertia is an opposition to switching behaviour. It is not indifference or a lack of consideration of the episode of dissatisfaction.

This research is near from those of Singh (1990) as well as Dart and Freeman (1994). Indeed, in his research on dissatisfied consumer's behaviour, Singh proposes a four group typology: passives, voicers, irates, and activists. Passives correspond to inert customers as presented by Zeelenberg and Pieters (2004) and are below average in voicing complaints. Voicers complain to their service provider. Irates have negative word of mouth and a higher propensity to switch. Activists complain to third parties and take a legal action. Dart and Freeman (1994) apply this typology in an industrial context and found the following partition: passives 42%, voicers 34 %, irates 5 %, activists 20 %.

Therefore, elements exist in the literature to show that part of dissatisfied industrial customers do not change their supplier. They can be called inert or passive, the prevalent idea is that these customers remain with their supplier, even after an episode of dissatisfaction. Many consumer and industrial researches have focused on the importance of the switching costs to explain this absence of reaction of dissatisfied customers. But they have forgotten many other explanatory variables (Yanamanadram and White 2006).

In order to identify the reasons why some dissatisfied customers do not change their supplier, we led a literature review on the determinants of long-term purchase behaviours and long-term customer-supplier relationships. This literature review enabled us to emphasize ten important determinants for long-term purchase behaviours which can lead a customer to maintain the relationship with his supplier after a dissatisfaction.

How to explain that dissatisfied customers continue a relationship?

The literature provides many determinants to explain why a customer develops long-term relationship with his supplier. Ten of them seem to have a strong influence over the duration of the customer-supplier relationship. This influence is all the more important that it can lead the customer to maintain his relationship even after an unsatisfactory episode. We classified these determinants into three categories:

1. Positive reasons. It is the reasons which can maintain a good relationship after an unsatisfactory episode (even if the source of dissatisfaction is important). They correspond to the classic antecedents of customer's loyalty.
2. Negative reasons. The customer feels constraint to maintain the relationship even if the source of dissatisfaction is recurring and / or deep. In this case, the customer does not really want to continue the relationship, but he has (or think he has) no other choice.
3. Bad reasons (neither positive nor negative) In this case, the customer refuses the problems and the difficulties. He doesn't want to see them and doesn't want to act or react to the situation.

We will, then, present these three categories by detailing for each of them the determinants which push the customer to maintain his relationship.

1. Positive reasons

Literature on loyalty and on customer-supplier relationships allowed to highlight five basic elements of the relationship, directly related to the characteristics and competences of the supplier, which lead the customer to develop positive long-term relationships with him:

- Trust of the customer towards the supplier
- Commitment of the customer to the relationship
- Perceived value by the customer
- Length of the relationship
- Past (fast and positive) supplier's response to dissatisfaction

Trust

Among the antecedents of buyer stability, trust appears to be of major importance (see for example: Anderson & Weitz 1989, Doney & Canon 1997, Ganesan 1994, Morgan & Hunt 1994, Moorman & al. 1992 and 1993). It is generally defined as “the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence” (Moorman et al. 1992) and according to the large majority of the researches, its mechanisms seem quite clear. Customer’s perception of supplier’s trustworthiness begins to appear when the customer is convinced that the other party is honest, credible and benevolent. After a period, the feeling a trust takes place in the mind of the customer and its benefits on the relationship begin to develop. The customer’s willingness to maintain the relationship increases, and he focuses on the long-term benefits of the relationship.

In the specific industrial context, the customer can develop a feeling of trust in the firm as an entity, an organisation with its history, its structure and its strengths and weaknesses. But he can also develop this feeling of trust in the sales-representative, as a person, with his own characteristics, personality and his similarity or dissimilarity with the buyer (Bozzo 2007).

Commitment to the relationshipsip

Commitment has been widely investigated in the literature, above all by Relationship Marketing and IMP researchers. The diverse perspectives of the researches have lead to a variety of definitions, creating quite a confusion (Kim and Frazier 1997). Derived from some of the most important researches carried out (Anderson and Weitz 1992; Dwyer et al.1987; Moorman et al. 1992; and Morgan and Hunt 1994), the concept can be defined as the willingness of the customer to develop and maintain his relationship with a particular supplier.

In their work on organizational commitment, Allen and Meyer (1990) define the two components of commitment. On the one hand an instrumental (or calculated) motivation consists in a cognitive reason, based on the economic interest to continue the relationship. In addition an emotional (or hedonic) motivation results from the pleasure linked to the relationship itself. Consequently, “Employees with a strong affective commitment remain with the organization because they want to, whereas those with strong continuance commitment remain because they need to” (Meyer and Allen 1990). The same kind of mechanisms can be found for customer’s commitment to his supplier within long-term relationships (Rauyruen et al.2007).

Value

Perceived value can be defined as: “the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given” (Zeithaml 1988). Customers will, then, perceive a positive value if the benefits that come out from the relationship are superior to the sacrifices he has to make (Ulaga 2003, Ulaga and Eggert 2005).

In long term relationship value can be a driver for customer loyalty (Chiu et al. 2005) as well as supplier loyalty (Walter et al. 2001). As a matter of fact, when the ratio benefits / sacrifices is positive, the customer and the supplier have a real interest in maintaining the relationship.

Going a step further, Möller (2006) pointed out different level of value, from exchange oriented value to future oriented relational value. Depending on the value level, the customers will be more or less engaged in relationship stability. In other words, customers who are experiencing strong value will be very concerned by maintaining their relationship, even if they are facing problems with their supplier.

Length of the relationship

Since the works of Granovetter (1973) researches in relationship marketing have underlined the importance of the length of the relationship in the construction of industrial customers' loyalty. The mechanism generally proposed in these researches is the following: the older the relationship, the more positive the link between the two parts (Stanko et al. 2007). Nevertheless, some authors also highlighted an increase in the switching costs with the increase of the length of the relationship (Weiz and Anderson 1992). The customer then maintains his relationship with the supplier because he has invested in it and a change would be too expensive for him. In both cases, the customer-supplier link is reinforced over time and with the development of the relationship.

Past supplier's response to dissatisfaction

Faced to an incident, a problem or a source of dissatisfaction for the customer, the supplier has several kinds of possible reactions. Davidow (2003) identifies, for example, six of them (timeliness, facilitation, redress, apology, credibility, attentiveness) Kelley et al. (1993) twelve (from discount to no reaction). If he wants to give the relationship a chance to continue, the supplier must have a reaction and this reaction must be adapted to the customer's expectations (Wirtz and Mattila 2004).

The last reaction of the supplier after an incident or a source of dissatisfaction can, thus, be determining in the continuation of the relationship (Choi and Mattila 2008). Indeed, a rapid and positive response in the past, conform with customer's expectations, could even increase customer's satisfaction with his supplier (Maxham and Netemeyer 2002). Consequently, if the customer knows that his supplier can react correctly faced to a problem, he will easily forgive him an incident.

This rule is not, however, valid for repeated incidents. The customer would exceed a level of acceptance and reject the relationship.

2. negative reasons

In very different situations from what we have just evoked, cases exist where the customer feels constrained to maintain his relationship with the supplier, even when he has suffered several unsatisfactory episodes. Several explanations can be found to this kind of behaviour. Among most significant in the literature, we can find:

- Customer's dependence towards his supplier
- Perceived switching costs
- Pressure of the customer's customers (derived demand)

Customer's dependence

Customer's dependence is an unilateral dependence, synonym of "coercion, conflict and domination" (Oliver 1990), and based on an asymmetry of power between the two parts (Dwyer et al. 1987; Geyskens et al. 1996; Wilson 1995). This asymmetry of power may exist from the customer towards his supplier or from the supplier towards his customer (Dabholkar et al. 1994). Since this study concerns customer buying behaviour, we will only consider here the dependence of a customer towards his supplier, and the influence of this dependence on customer behaviour. This influence consists mainly in a stabilization of the purchases, based on the perceived risk and switching costs. As an hostage of the relationship, the customer develops regular and stable purchases (Jones and Sasser 1997).

Morgan and Hunt (1994) argue that "the continuing exercise of power to gain acquiescence also destroys trust and commitment, which decreases cooperation and inhibits long-term success". Nevertheless, dependence is a strong motivation to stay with a supplier in a short or mid-term perspective.

Switching costs

The perceived switching costs correspond to the perception by the customer of the investments he will have to make if he changes his supplier. Jones and al. (2002) divide these costs into three categories: continuity costs (lost performance costs, uncertainty costs), learning costs (pre-switching search and evaluation costs, post-switching behavioural and cognitive costs, setup costs) and sunk costs. In a more general way, these costs are at the same time financial, temporal and psychological (Dick and Basu 1994).

Various researches have demonstrated the influence of switching costs on customer loyalty (for example Dwyer et. al. 1987 or Heide and Weiss 1995). For Jones et al. (2000) “when perceived switching costs are high, customers may remain despite their dissatisfaction due to perceptions that switching costs outweigh switching benefits”.

Switching costs appear to be a possible motivation to stay for industrial customers, even in unsatisfactory situations.

Pressure of the customer's customers (derived demand)

The industrial markets are characterized by the existence of a derived demand, i.e. the demand of the customer's customers (Hakansson 1982). This characteristic can have a strong influence on the relationships a company has with his suppliers. Indeed, some companies are strongly submitted to the pressure of their own customers (Haas 1982) who suggest them, or even require, specific suppliers (Bishop et al. 1984).

Thus, a dissatisfied industrial customer may not change his supplier, just because he knows that he would face problems with his own customers if he does so.

3. bad reasons (neither positive nor negative)

Lastly, a dissatisfied industrial customer can maintain his relationship with his supplier in order to avoid facing the problem or react. Contrary to the two preceding cases where the customer completely considerate his dissatisfaction when he chooses to maintain the relationship, this third configuration corresponds to customers who do not want to see, accept and deal with the problem. They, thus, prefer not to pay attention, to react or see what is happening. Among the explanatory elements of this kind of behaviour, two appears to be important:

- Customer's inertia
- Fear for change

Inertia

Inertia can be defined as a particular state for industrial customers developing regular and stable buying behaviour without any real strong positive feelings (Bozzo 2002). Inert customers mainly develop long-term relationships with their suppliers because they want to limit the information

research process and the cost of thinking (Bawa 1990). They already know their supplier and don't want to make any additional effort to search and evaluate a new one.

An inert customer generally does not feel any particular commitment or attachment to the relationship with his supplier. This kind of firm keeps its time and energy for other activities (Nicosia, 1966, Engell, Kollat et Blackwell, 1973) and does not want to waste time and energy in new supplier acquisition.

Inertia has been specifically identified as an antecedent for non-switching behaviour for dissatisfied customers in B to B service sector (White and Yanamandram 2004).

Fear for change

The fear of what could be found after having changed supplier can be a strong motivation for the stability of customer-supplier relationships. Directly related to the tolerance for the risk (Sheth and Shah 2003), the fear for change can prevent an industrial customer from changing. It can lead him to continue his relationship with his current supplier in order to take no risk to make a mistake or find an even worse supplier.

Gopalakrishna-Pillai and Sharma (2003) insist on the fact that "the termination of a relationship may not be problematic for individuals who have better alternative relationships that can satisfy their needs". Therefore, those who do not see quality alternatives are likely to maintain the relationship, even if they are not satisfied, just because they are afraid of what they could find with another supplier (Hocutt, 1998).

First validation by a qualitative study

A qualitative study was undertaken in order to propose a first empirical validation of the proposition resulting from the literature review. The study was undertaken in the form of semi-directive interviews with representatives of 15 industrial customers. They had lived one or more negative episodes with one of their suppliers without changing their buying behaviour. The objective of these interviews was to confront the reality of these companies with our proposal, in order to validate or modify it according to the results.

1. Set up of the study

The interviews were carried out with the most competent person within the firm regarding the information. Namely, we interviewed purchasers, product users and marketing directors. To identify

this person, we had the same methodology in all the companies: we contacted the marketing director, we exposed him the object of the study and asked him to tell us which was the most adapted person to take part to the study.

The interviews proceeded on the following mode:

- Choice by the interviewed of an incident, a problem, a negative event who could have compromised the relationship but whose exit was its continuation. We left the choice of the event on the initiative of the interviewed person so that he feels concerned by the problem and has all the elements to speak about it.
- Explanation of how the problem took place, occurred and ended. The objective of this part was to understand the source of dissatisfaction described by the interviewed and to start to detect first explanations on relationship continuation.
- Relationship with the supplier before and after this problem. The objective of this last part was to identify the reasons which motivated the customer not to break the relationship and to check if they correspond with our three categories.

2. Results of the interviews

The incidents and problems chosen by the interviewed were relatively similar. For 7 of them they were problems linked to products delivery (delay, errors compared to the order or damaged goods). For 5 others, the source of dissatisfaction was related to an invoice problem. Lastly, 3 interviewed described us problems of under-quality of the products compared to their expectations.

More than half of the interviewed spontaneously specified that their dissatisfaction was “*not important compared to all that we had built in the past with this supplier*”. Looking further into their speech, we realized that they corresponded completely to the first category of customers: those who stay for positive reasons. On the whole, 7 out of 15 interviewed correspond to this profile. The various explanatory variables of this kind of behaviour came up from the interviews:

- The importance of their **trust** towards the supplier in the continuation of the relationship after a problem transpires in all the interviews. We founded elements like: “*even if there were a problem, I knew that this supplier was serious and able to do his job well. There was thus no reason not to continue to buy at his place*” or “*it is the best [supplier] on the market and I know that this kind of event will not occur again*”. Trust towards the salesman was also present in the speeches: “*he is a good salesman and he is honest. Making a mistake can happen to everyone, we were not going to stop everything for that*”

- **Commitment** to the relationship appears through sentences like “*we did not want*” or “*we never thought*” or “*it was not a possible alternative*” to end the relationship.
- The **perceived value** of the relationship also arises very clearly from the interviews. The interviewed talked all about the “*advantages to work with this supplier*”, of the “*positive quality/price ratio which enables us to save money without lowering the quality of our products*”, linked to the fact that “*compared to others [suppliers] their products are more reliable*”, etc The benefit/sacrifice ratio which appears in the various speeches clearly indicate the strong value associated to the relationship.
- As far as the **length of the relationship** is concerned, it does not clearly appear in all the interviews. Indeed, some clearly expressed the fact that they “*had worked for more than 30 years with this supplier... This means something. We, thus, tend to forgive a small failure*”. Others, on the other hand, specified that “*it is true that we’ve been working together for a long time, but that is not really what counts in this kind of situation*”. For this second category, the length of the relationship was less important than trust they have in their supplier and/or than value they get from this relationship.
- Only a part of the interviewed had experienced **past supplier’s reactions** faced to problems. Indeed, some told us that “*it had already occurred a few years ago and the supplier had a very good reaction. We, thus, knew that we could trust him from this point of view*”, or “*last time we had a problem, the sales manager apologized and checked that everything had been regulated. Whatever happened, it was important for us*”. Those which had never yet been confronted with a problem with their supplier had a strong feeling that everything would occur well: “*I knew that they would have a good reaction*”.
- An additional element came out from the interviews: the **involvement** in the product category. It appears that the more the customer is implied, the more he will tend to continue the relationship. The interviewees told us things like: “*more, it is a product I know well since I worked in this field a few years ago. I know that this kind of problems can occur*” or “*it is an important product for us*”.

When they spoke about the source of their dissatisfaction, 4 people out of the 15 could be attached to the second profile, namely those which remain for negative reasons. They explain, indeed, their stability of behaviour by sentences like: “*in any case, could we really do something else?*” or “*we continued to buy, but there was no other choice*”, or “*we would have face problems even harder to manage*”.

- **Customer’s dependence** face to the supplier is, of course, a basic element in this kind of behaviour. The customers explained during the interviews: “*we have no other choice... He is the*

only one able to provide us this product at such a low price”, “he is exclusive importer”, “he is the only one who accepts our terms of payment. All the others refuse to work with us”, “I do not see which other company could match”, etc. The list of the explanation and rationalization is long...

- But the dependence can be also expressed through the **pressure of the customer’s customers**. The interviewees did not really felt this pressure directly. It was more an indirect problem for 2 of the 4 companies. Indeed, *“our customers never said anything to us, but we know that they will not appreciate if we stop working with this supplier”*. One interviewee told us that *“we could find another supplier abroad, but it won’t be good for us if our customers learn it”*.
- Finally, **perceived switching costs** are an obvious reason not to stop the relationship. Financial aspect (*“nevertheless, their prices are very interesting”, “we have invested a lot, so we cannot change”*) and time investments (*“starting again... Explaining again everything... I can’t even think about it”*) clearly came out from the interviews.

Over the 15 people we met, 4 corresponded to the third profile. When we asked them to talk about a problem or a source of dissatisfaction, they initially had difficulties to choose one. For them, nothing seemed to have a real importance. *“We had this problem of delivery, but I do not see why it would be such a question. This kind of things can occur (...) Last time the sales-representative made a mistake ... a problem of interpretation... finally... nothing really important”*.

- **Inertia** strongly came out from these interviews: *“we are not going to change supplier all the time”, “nevertheless, in our kind of business we do not have time to think about this kind of problems and to change supplier. Then, when we find a “not too bad” supplier, we keep him”*.
- As far as the **fear for change** is concerned, we can find it through short sentences like: *“admitting that we would like to change, there is no guarantee that it will not be even worse with someone else”, or “I know them, at least, and I know how to make things become normal again”*
- Another element came out from the interviews and had not been identified within the literature review: the **personal operating process** of the person confronted with the dissatisfaction. The people concerned concluded by remarks such as: *“in any case I am not the kind of man who wastes his time on details”, “I really do not like to create problems for nothing”, “I do not want to waste my energy with this kind of things”*.

Conclusion

This research is a first approach of the motivations for the dissatisfied industrial customers to stay with their supplier. The qualitative study allowed us to have a first validation of the conclusions

resulting from the literature review on the three reasons which can lead a customer to remain with his supplier in this kind of situation. It also allowed us to validate the managerial interest of this research. Indeed, people we met (the marketing directors at the beginning or the people questioned during the interviews) expressed all a great interest for the subject. As a customer, they were interested by having an explanation of their own behaviour. They explained they do not have time to make this kind of introspection however it could be very useful for their job. They were thus interested by the potential results of the research. But these customers are also suppliers. As a supplier, the understanding of their customers' behaviour, especially during difficult periods, is a central issue. However, they are very often interested in the customers who leave and try to understand why. But they do not have time to investigate why some of them remain. This study can give them some explanations, help them to categorize their customers and provide a basis for future work.

The following step of this research is to set up a quantitative study in order to be able to determine the proportions of each category among the customers who do not change their supplier, as well as the importance of each variable within each category. The great majority of the measurement scales exist. The questionnaire will be, then, quite easy to build. As far as the methodology of the study is concerned, we chose an on-line questionnaire. We will e-mail a link to the questionnaire to purchasers, technical managers, or production and marketing directors. The questionnaire will also appear directly on-line on professional web-sites (market places, B to B specific web-sites, etc) with the agreement of these ones. The objective is to question customers on an incident they will choose, with a supplier they will choose, on the occasion of which they did not change their behaviour.

The qualitative study also allowed us to highlight the importance of variables we had not found in the literature review. It seems possible to integrate the involvement in the product category within the positive reasons. The involvement is a well-known determinant of loyalty for B to C markets. It can define it as "A person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests" (Zaichowsky 1985). Russell-Bennett and Al (2007) underline in a recent research that the concept has received little attention in industrial environment whereas it can be important in this context. The authors show that, for small companies, the involvement in product category has a direct impact on the emotional component of loyalty as well as on customer.

The personal operating process of the person confronted with the dissatisfaction also appeared within the bad reasons. Indeed, some people tend not to react (and justify it very well). In this kind of situation, the relationship does not end even if a problem occurs as long as the person goes on with this kind of behaviour.

These variables raise the question of the introduction of other variables to explain the three kinds of behaviour. Indeed, beyond the personal sensitivity which influences trust, commitment, or fear for change, some specific elements of individuals' personality can (just as personal operating process) influence the behaviour. It would be, thus, interesting in a future research to pay attention to this kind of variables by carrying out a complementary literature review.

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