

Influence of commitment on vendor selection in IT purchases

A Work in Progress

Abstract:

Commitment is often seen one of the key constructs of relationship marketing in business-to-business context, as it has been found to lead to desirable relational outcomes like cooperation, long-term orientation, loyalty and decreased propensity to terminate a relationship (e.g. Abdul-Muhmin, 2003; Gounaris, 2005), also leading to business performance outcomes (Ahlfors, 2005). However, the influence of this construct on actual vendor selection situations has often been forgotten, leading us to focus on studying the actual significance of commitment on the criteria on which IT purchases are settled on. Therefore, particular interest in this qualitative study is on investigating the relationship between commitment – calculative and affective commitment (e.g. Kelly, 2004) – and its role in customer relationships (e.g. de Ruyter, Moorman and Lemmink, 2001) affecting vendor selection among IT buyers. Our analyses are based on eight theme interviews conducted among medium-sized and large companies in Finland, during the end of 2007 and beginning of 2008.

Keywords: relationship marketing, commitment, vendor selection, IT-purchasing

Authors:

Eliina Hartojoki, M.Sc.
University of Jyväskylä
School of Business and Economics
P.O. Box 35
FIN-40014 UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
eliina.hartojoki at econ.jyu.fi

Ulla-Riitta Ahlfors, Ph.D.
University of Jyväskylä
School of Business and Economics
P.O. Box 35
FIN-40014 UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
ulla.ahlfors at econ.jyu.fi

Juha Munnukka, Ph.D.
University of Jyväskylä
School of Business and Economics
P.O. Box 35
FIN-40014 UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
juha.munnukka at econ.jyu.fi

Introduction

Commitment is often treated as a key construct in relationship marketing research in business-to-business context, as it has been found to lead to desirable relational outcomes like cooperation, long-term orientation, loyalty and decreased propensity to terminate relationships (e.g. Abdul-Muhmin 2003; Gounaris 2005), also leading to business performance outcomes (Ahlfors 2005). However, the influence of this construct on actual vendor selection situations has often been forgotten, leading us to focus on studying the actual significance of commitment on the criteria on which IT purchases are settled on. Therefore, particular interest in this qualitative study is on investigating the relationship between commitment – calculative and affective commitment (e.g. Kelly 2004) – and its role in customer relationships (e.g. de Ruyter, Moorman and Lemmink 2001) affecting vendor selection among IT buyers. Our analyses are based on eight semi-structured interviews conducted among medium-sized and large companies in Finland, during the end of 2007 and beginning of 2008. The firm size categorisation in this study follows the guidelines of EU CIRD92850 manual (2003).

Prior studies concerning vendor selection and the role of commitment in business markets have mainly concentrated on industry (de Ruyter et al. 2001), on a product or service, from a customer retention perspective (Gounaris 2005), or on a general perspective of inter-firm relationships (Johanson 1989, Kelly 2004). There have been only few attempts to study specifically IT-purchasing, and commitment or vendor selection in this context (de Ruyter et al. 2001, Snijders and Tazelaar 2005). Therefore in this study, we chose to look at different dimensions of commitment in IT-purchasing, among any industry, also without taking any IT-product-specific perspective.

In this qualitative study we concentrate on exploring relationship commitment and its influences on a buyer's vendor selection in IT purchases. Even though we acknowledge the importance of both trust and loyalty in managing relationships, we choose to limit these concepts out of this study, only mentioning them when they are essential in previous research on this topic. Our research question is constructed as follows: *How does commitment influence a firm's IT-vendor selection?* In the following chapter, prior studies in the field of commitment research are reviewed.

Literature review

Industrial buying is most often, especially by business practitioners, described as a rational and objective decision making process where vendor selection is the result of rational evaluation of potential vendors by purchasing professionals (cf. Weber, 1996). In a vendor selection process, applying right selection criteria in choosing from all potential vendors is the key to successful and prosperous relationship (Svensson 2004). Dickson (1966) was the seminal researcher on this topic. He surveyed 273 purchasing managers and obtained altogether 23 vendor selection criteria. The seven most often mentioned criteria were quality, delivery, performance history, warranties and claim policies, facilities and capacity, price, and technical capability (Weber et al. 2000). Weber and Benton (1991) found in their review of 74 articles in academic journals that vendor selection is most often based on six following criteria: price, delivery, quality, facilities and capacity, geographic location, and technical capability.

More emphasis has been put on rational and objective criteria in prior studies. For example, Puto, Patton and King (1985) and Sheth (1977) have found in their separate studies that psychological factors have an essential role in organisational buying decisions, influencing directly the vendor selection. One of the key criteria influencing the buying decisions is the relationship criteria involving in the supplier-buyer relationship (e.g. Masella and Rangone, 2000). In this context, vendor selection is influenced by two characteristics, the time frame (short-term vs. long-term) and the content (logistics vs. strategic), of the relationship. Donaldson (1996) found in his study that vendor-buyer relationships can be divided into three levels: (i) personal relationship, often but not always, between the salesperson and the purchasing manager; (ii) the relationship develops as a result of a vendor's (and buyer's) competence and performance; and (iii) the relationship is more strategic and embodies joint co-operation. Vendor selection is strongly influenced by the characteristics of the relationship – i.e. mutual loyalty and commitment to the relationship.

Commitment

Commitment can be considered as a critical variable in measuring the future of a relationship (Wilson 2000). In the literature, commitment has been defined as an exchange party's belief that a relationship is as important as to deserve maximum efforts at maintaining it indefinitely (Morgan and Hunt 1994); as the motivation to stay with the supplier and willingness to invest resources into a relationship (Gounaris 2005, Wilson 1995). Also Berry and Parasuraman (1992) see commitment as a vital ingredient of successful relationships leading to loyalty – i.e. repurchases and attitudinal likelihood of repurchase (Evanschitzky et al., 2006). Therefore, in this study we see loyalty and vendor selection as closely intertwined concepts that refer to a buyer's intention to choose between the current vendor and other, potential vendors in IT purchase situations.

Several different motivations can be seen underlying under buyers intention to maintain a relationship with the current vendor. This perceived commitment that binds two companies together and keep them in the relationship has received extensive attention in the field of marketing over the recent years (e.g. Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Johanson, 1989) Researchers of relationship marketing, relationship commitment and trust have generated a number of various supplementary and complementary dimensions of commitment. These dimensions commonly approach commitment through two broad perspectives, psychological and behavioural dimensions (e.g. Anderson and Weitz 1992, Gilliland and Bello 2002). Gounaris (2005) and de Ruyter and colleagues (2001) refer to affective and calculative commitment. Sharma, Young and Wilkinson (2006) found that affective commitment is stronger, and has a more important role than calculative, in developing and maintaining long-lasting relationships. According to Gounaris (2005), affective commitment creates favourable intentions that help to preserve and reinforce the relationship but calculative commitment has the opposite effect. Anderson and Weitz (1992) see that by creating dependencies and locking-in vendors, these feel “impelled” so seek alternatives and to escape from this state.

Affective commitment

Konovsky and Cropanzano (1996) refer by affective commitment to a general positive feeling towards the partner. A company desires to continue a relationship because it likes the partner and enjoys the partnership. It experiences a sense of loyalty and commitment to each other. Thus, affective commitment is closely linked to vendor-buyer relationships as it is generated most efficiently through personal contacts with a vendor (de Ruyter et al, 2001). It contains both psychological and behavioural dimensions (Sharma, Young and Wilkinson, 2006). The psychological dimension can be understood as a level of attachment between exchange partners, and consists of attitudes and beliefs concerning the relationship (Gilliland and Bello, 2002); aspiration to continue the relationship (Anderson and Weitz, 1989); preference for current relationship partner (Teas and McElroy, 1986); and long-term orientation (Brown, Lusch and Nicholson, 1995). The behavioural dimension of commitment refers to exchange partners' commitment to relationship continuation and the investments of financial, human, and physical assets for the relationship (Sharma, Young & Wilkinson, 2006).

The importance of this positively charged, affective commitment is further heightened as relationships and relationship management are getting more strategic across the industries and organizations, and thus growing in importance. Wilson (1995) links this view to the present paper by stating that “relationships have become strategic...as firms strive to create relationships to achieve their goals”. The same tendency is found to exist also in high technology industry which generally contains higher perceived risks, and therefore, companies are aiming at personal relationships to lessen the prevailing risks in IT vendor selection (Abratt, 1986). The importance of personal relationships, and thus also of affective commitment, has been confirmed by the findings of de Ruyter et al (2001), as they found that affective commitment plays an essential role in high tech markets and is crucial for creating long-term relationships.

Calculative commitment

In contrast to affective level commitment, calculative (or cognitive) commitment is more rational, economic-based and refers to exchange partners' intentions to stay in the relationship, partly due to economical constraints, e.g. high switching costs and scarcity of alternatives (e.g. Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Anderson and Weitz, 1989). It is based on the objective, structural constraints that motivates a firm to stay in a relationship and do not give any cognitive consideration on terminating it (Gounaris, 2005). For instance, Gustafsson, Johnson and Roos (2005) found in their study on telecommunication services that calculative commitment is highly important for maintaining customer relationships as it implies the viability and competitiveness of the value proposition. Calculative commitment was found to have a positive effect on a customer relationship, decreasing the client's propensity to terminate the relationship.

Sharma, Young and Wilkinson (2006) separate the calculative commitment concept into two further dimensions, *negative and positive*, which both result from a calculation of costs and benefits (Allen and Meyer,

1991). Calculative negative commitment, which is often referred to as cognitive continuance commitment (Kanter, 1968) or cognitive instrumental motivation (Wiener, 1982), is seen as a negatively oriented type of motivation which is based on an anticipation of high termination or switching costs associated with leaving from the relationship. In the case that this type of commitment is prevailing, exchange partners assess the relationship through cost-benefit calculations for deciding whether it is possible to leave the relationship. (Gounaris, 2005; de Ruyter et al, 2001) Another dimension of calculative commitment, the positive, is based on economic constraints, as well, and on cognitive economic calculations of gain or assumptions of benefits (Sharma, Young and Wilkinson, 2006). In this type of commitment, a firm is concerned about gains arising from direct and indirect functions of the relationship, such as profits, efficiency gains, information, referrals, and resource access (Walter et al., 2003). The decision of staying, or leaving the relationship, is here based on the positive aspects of the relationship. Calculative commitment is an essential part of buyer-vendor relationships, especially in the case of IT industry where the competitiveness of products and services is highly dynamic.

In the following, we use abbreviations to demonstrate the various dimensions of commitment. Affective commitment is marked as AC; positive calculative commitment as PCC; and negative calculative commitment as NCC.

Research Methodology

Qualitative, interpretive, research was selected as a method because the purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the complex phenomenon of the role of commitment in IT-vendor selection. Views have been expressed, for instance by Das (1983), that qualitative, in-depth and open-ended research design is essential to capture the complex and multidimensional decision making patterns within organizations (Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Grønhaug 2002). The research was guided by the assumption that the firm's vendor selection would be influenced by an ongoing customer relationship, if there is one, and commitment to this vendor.

Data collection

The empirical data was collected through theme interviews based on themes/questions found in theoretical literature on the subject (e.g. de Ruyter et al, 2001; Gounaris, 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Sharma et al, 2006). This interview method was chosen because the aim was to have a discussion with the interviewee so that all themes were covered but the method also allows for flexibility and provides the chance to discuss some issues in more depth. The interview guide included the following main themes: background information about the firm and the interviewee, general information concerning the purchased IT-product and motives behind the adoption, factors affecting vendor selection, relationship evaluation (including relationship history, commitment, trust, dependency, information exchange), and the interviewee's opinion of the future of the relationship.

The interviews were conducted in 3 medium-sized and 5 large companies in Finland during the end of 2007 and beginning of 2008. The companies were selected to represent various industries; manufacturing industry, publishing, energy, retail, construction, and food services (Table 1). All companies have good reputation, their brands are known in Finland and some are also known in the rest of Europe. Most of the companies have a long history and three of them have expanded their functions abroad. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their [assumed] active involvement in the firm's IT purchasing and their responsibility for the firm's IT-vendor relationship. The interviewees were: five IT-managers, a managing director, a financial manager, and, in one manufacturing firm, both the managing director and the manager of process planning.

In this study, we chose not to take a perspective of any specific IT-product; the interviewees were asked to think about the firm's latest important IT-purchase. This was considered as an appropriate way, because the interviewees were supposed to best remember this purchase and be motivated to tell about it. The interviewees categorized the purchased IT-product to software or hardware. Most respondents (six out of eight) had many years experience of the selected IT-vendor. However the two firms not having the earlier experience of the vendor had known the vendor from other connection and the vendor was not "totally new". Table 1 below presents summary of firms' background information:

Table 1 Background information on the participant firms

Industry	Employees	Firm's age	Functions	Purchased IT-product	Experience on this vendor
Manufacturing	700	27 years	Finland, Russian, Eastern Europe	software	6 years
Manufacturing	1100	130	Finland, Baltic Countries	software	over 18 years
Construction	85	21	Finland	software	15 years
Publishing	1200	136	Finland	hardware	7 years
Energy	1800	68	Finland, the Baltic Region	hardware	over 10 years
Manufacturing	120	58	Finland	software	No
Food services	200	133	Finland	software	No
Retail	500	149	Finland	software	over 10 years

The length of the interviews varied from 45 minutes to almost two hours. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) one method of creating codes is creating a provisional "start list" of codes prior to fieldwork. This code list is based on the conceptual framework and list of research questions. The codes used in organising the data were: vendor evaluation, vendor selection, calculative commitment and affective commitment.

To gain an in-depth understanding of the effect of commitment on the firms' IT-vendor selection, the empirical data is reviewed through definitions of affective [AC] and calculative [CC] commitment, including positive [PCC] and negative calculative commitment [NCC]. Also the three level relationship ladder represented by Donaldson (1996) is used. However, qualitative research is always a dialogue between the background theory and new findings based on empirical data.

Findings

To begin with, the topic was approached through asking the interviewees about the criteria that need to be considered when evaluating potential IT-vendors. According to interviewees, letting the vendors compete is an important part of business buying process. Usually the firms sent an inquiry to 3-5 potential vendors. It seems that in most cases the vendor evaluation included the following factors: systems' compatibility, system's functionality, vendor's credibility, vendor's experience of the industry, vendor's know-how, price, and references. Also the vendors' local presence was evaluated in hardware purchases. As expected, these findings seem to follow the earlier studies of industrial buying (Weber et al., 2000; Weber and Benton, 1991). However, the actual vendor selection was often seen affected by earlier experience of the vendor, good relationships with the vendor, and positive feelings about the vendor. As one of the interviewees expressed: "When there are two good vendors, the selection is a matter of taste...this is much more than just technique" or, as another participant expressed: "...they have already made the integrations and we wanted to go ahead with fast schedule". These findings imply that commitment to present vendor influences the firm's IT-vendor selection.

Calculative commitment

Negative calculative commitment [NCC]: Almost all firms agreed that the switching of the vendor would be difficult, time-consuming and costly. This refers to 2nd level, product/firm/contractual/technology-based commitment. Most of the interviewed firms mentioned being fairly dependent on the vendor; however, scarcity of alternative IT-vendors or IT-products was not mentioned at all. The product is so important, even business-critical, to the firm, which creates this dependence. Also the already-made investment - time and resources, including work, money and training - to the purchasing and implementation of the IT-product creates this commitment. Additionally, most products were customized according to the buyer's needs and/or integrated to the buyer's other systems.

On the other hand, the type of the purchased IT-product is considered to influence the intensity of negative calculative commitment. According to the respondents, hardware and the acquired software licenses committed the firm to the vendor for a certain time period [2nd level; product/ firm/ contractual/technical]. Firstly, the hardware products have a certain life cycle. Secondly, the licensing contract is valid for a specific

time, one year, for instance. However, this type of commitment is considered quite multifaceted, having sometimes also the dimension of commitment to the individual sales person, hence representing the 2nd commercial/contract/product/company level, and also the personal, 1st level commitment. This commitment type, however, has the additional aspect that it is more based on calculative thinking [than affective], through considering the economicality and easiness of purchasing, through a minimum of effort investment in purchasing. If the sales person who is perceived as experienced and reliable moves to another firm, at the right time, the buyer will be likely to follow him/her to the new IT-vendor.

Positive calculative commitment [PCC]: Considering the benefits of the purchases, all interviewees agreed that the products were important or highly important to the firm's long-term profitability and business operations [3rd, strategic level]. The direct economic benefits of the purchased IT-products were costs savings, efficiency, reliability, and information [2nd level]. All interviewees asserted that they favour long-term vendor-relationships. The vendor's potential for remaining in the market in the coming future and continuous development of their systems were considered highly important. These issues refer to the long-term use of the IT-products and also to the possibility of purchasing and integrating new components to the present system. Some firms were also worried about a potential merger of IT-vendors because large IT-vendors were seen too dominant, having substantial negotiation power.

Some interviewees also expressed an intention to increase their commitment to the vendor by continuing their business with them, and increasing it through higher volumes and/or more responsibility [3rd, strategic level]. The following statements exemplify this:

"...we have chosen a partner with whom we will go far"
"...we are expecting to give them bigger responsibility in future"

Despite the willingness to develop long-term relationship with the vendor, buyers seem to actively attempt to reduce their calculative commitment to the IT-vendor through rational purchasing. The following statements illustrate this:

"...we didn't want to put all eggs to the same basket and consciously chose the other vendor"
"...we want to give an opportunity to all vendors"

According to some interviewees there are also another ways to reduce commitment and increase the buyer's opportunity to switch between vendors. These interviewees see detailed documentation and their own know-how as means of decreasing vendor power, decreasing the buyer's dependence on vendor's competence [mostly 2nd but also 1st level commitment]. As one IT-manager expressed:

"...we have to know and do things ourselves...I don't see it workable that the vendor would participate actively to our business".

Affective commitment

Good experiences in mutual business and fast and easy purchasing create buyer trust in a vendor's competence. This, together with familiarity with the organisation, and with their personnel, creates [positively charged] affective commitment [AC]. Six firms of eight have earlier experience of the selected IT-vendor. They all agreed that this has positively affected to their IT-vendor selection. They had good experiences of the vendor and their products, they know the vendor's manners and working habits and also the vendor knows their business and their habits.

The importance of personal relationships with the vendors' contact persons; salesperson, project manager, account manager [1st level, personal commitment], is exemplified in our data. This makes it easier to manage and create a long lasting business relationship. AC is also increased in a relationship where the vendor company perceives the buyer company as important and valuable.

Personal relationships may have a positive effect in the flow of processes and things, through better understanding, and they may also be critical in the starting of the IT implementation project.

"In such purchases where there are key people, participating, then I always want to them and discuss with them., because people may seem good on paper and may have extraordinary expertise... but when they are brought to

our place, it occasionally is the case that they are unable to communicate with our people...if the project manager is nervous or busy in the first meeting, or cannot get a word out of the mouth, it is useful to think what the problem is.”

”If the chemistry is O’kay, then it is O’kay also in the development work.”

AC may have a negative consequence to a relationship with a vendor, if a contact person changes. AC can also become a liability through too strong bonds between the companies compared to what is recommendable considering the independence in business decisions. A relationship with a vendor may ‘accidentally’ have become too closely connected. This may restrict a company’s possibility to identify and benefit from new possibilities.

“It is problematic to us, if the people of the other party change every half year... it is disturbing, when an experienced person leaves....then the relationship always is negatively affected and it may then be terminated more easily.”

“... is even a bit too important. It shouldn’t necessarily be so that as many a program as possible is from the same vendor...it always restricts us a bit...is however a focal program to us...is a very important vendor.”

Combinatory view

According to our empirical data, commitment is many-sided phenomenon. It can be considered not only through the three levels that have been addressed in earlier research, namely, personal [1st level], commercial [2nd], and business/strategic [3rd level]. It can also be considered through three themes: buyer’s commitment to the *IT-product*, to the vendor *company* and to the vendor’s *contact person* (sales person, project manager or account manager). These three themes can cover both affective and calculative commitment, and they can be associated to the earlier mentioned three levels. Most of the themes fall into the 2nd, commercial level, as they are operational in character. Yet, the benefits can be also strategic, hence creating 3rd level commitment. Personal level is mostly represented by the affective commitment on 1st level, but in some cases, it also affects 3rd level commitment. Table 2 exemplifies the classifications of the different commitment types in commitment levels. The bigger, bolded fonts depict an emphasis on the odd level and the smaller font refers to a minor role of this odd level in the commitment.

Table 2 Commitment type and level

Commitment type	Commitment level		
	1 st	2 nd	3 rd
Negative calculative commitment [NCC]	x	X	
Positive calculative commitment [PCC]	x	X	X
Affective commitment [AC]	X	x	x

Based on the data, buyer - vendor relationships in IT-purchasing are characterised by a polarisation of affective [AC] and calculative [CC] commitment. In the interviews, 150 mentions were affective-related, and 150 were calculative-related, which were divided into negative calculative commitment [NCC] with 58 mentions, and positive calculative commitment [PCC] with 92 mentions. Hence, positive calculative commitment is emphasised among the calculative dimensions. Some of the mentions in our data are both calculative and affective, in which cases, the calculative commitment was always positively charged [PCC].

The deepening, or further developing, of a relationship is associated with an emphasis on CC, compared to AC. The firm, in this case, considers the benefits and constraints affecting the relationship, referring to 2nd level commitment.

Interestingly, maintaining the relationship on the present level, possibly also purchasing from other vendors, is associated with an emphasis on AC, compared to CC. This refers to a 1st level, personal commitment, without a strong linkage to the commercial/corporate/operational aspects of the relationship.

Positive calculative emphasis in buyer commitment is associated with a tendency to reduce the dependence on the present vendor, even though the company intends to continue their relationship with their present IT-vendor. Other vendors are also considered and used.

Conclusions

The importance of affective and calculative commitment to vendor selection has already widely been discussed. The purpose of this study was to find out how commitment influences a firm's IT vendor selection in the case where a firm has purchased before from a specific vendor. We have concentrated on relationship level, instead of alternatively looking at commitment on products or salesperson, although affective commitment can also be seen related with personal commitment. Our study includes these two perspectives in combining various commitment types of AC and CC with commitment levels, 1) personal, 2) commercial, and 3) business/strategic. We take a relationship commitment perspective and focus on the effect of commitment type and commitment level on IT vendor selection.

In line with some earlier research, our findings outline the importance of distinction between affective and calculative commitment. Especially distinction between positive calculative commitment [PCC] and negative calculative commitment [NCC] is seen highly important. Affective commitment creates favourable intentions to maintain the relationship and increases the likelihood of buying more from the same vendor. AC is typically 1st level commitment and does not necessarily lead to deepen the relationship. At this level the relationship is more personal; the buyer likes the vendor but also try to make rational vendor selection decisions. However, AC creates the foundation to 2nd and 3rd level commitments and has an essential role in high tech markets and in creating long-term relationships, as has been found earlier.

Negative calculative commitment has the opposite effect on the relationship; the buyers actively try to reduce their dependence on the vendor and willingness to create 3rd level commitment is not evident in our study. Our findings emphasize the importance of positive calculative commitment for creating long-term relationships. Positive calculative commitment [PCC] creates both 2nd and 3rd level commitment. At the 3rd level, the relationship is more strategic and embodies joint co-operation, which finding confirms some earlier findings. Thus it would appear that positive calculative commitment has the most important role on long-lasting relationships and also buyers' IT-vendor selection.

This study has brought up the differences in influence of various commitment types on IT-vendor selection. We highlight the importance of positive calculative commitment. However, we agree with other researchers on that also affective commitment has its role in developing and maintaining relationships, even if its effect is different from the one that positive calculative commitment has.

A limitation in this study may be that the sample only consists of eight firms. The sample however saturated within the research framework, which indicates that their number was sufficient. We acknowledge that the topic is complex and is perceived relatively confidential, or at least, requires discretion when speaking about it with research participants. This had some, although a minor, effect in agreeing on the interviews. As future steps in this research, we conduct a quantitative survey in USA, Finland, and Norway.

Future research could also, for instance, focus on the types of benefits that client companies expect to gain when continuing their relationship with an IT-vendor.

References

- Abdul-Muhmin, A. (2003) "Instrumental and interpersonal determinants of relationship satisfaction and commitment in industrial markets", **Journal of Business Research**, Vol 58, pp. 619-628.
- Abratt, R. (1986) "Industrial buying in high-tech markets", **Industrial Marketing Management**, Vol 15, pp. 293-298.
- Ahlfors, U. (2005) **Successful Interactive Business: Integration of Strategy and IT**, Jyväskylä Studies in Business and Economics, Vol 38, Diss.
- Allen, N.J. & Meyer, J.P. (1991) "The measurement and antecedents of affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization", **Journal of Occupational Psychology**, Vol 63, pp. 1-18.
- Anderson, E. & Weitz, B. (1989) "Determinants of Continuity in conventional channel dyads", **Marketing Science**, Vol 8, pp. 310-323.
- Anderson, E. & Weitz, B.A. (1992) "The use of pledges to build and sustain commitment in distribution channels", **Journal of Marketing Research**, Vol 29, pp. 18-34.

- Bendapudi, N. & Berry, L. (1997) "Customers' motivations for maintaining relationships with service providers", **Journal of Retailing**, Vol 73 No 1, pp. 15-37.
- Berry, L. & Parasuraman, A. (1992) "Perceptions for a service quality revolution in America", **Organizational Dynamics**, Vol 20 No 4, pp. 4-15.
- Brown, J.R., Lusch, R.F. & Nicholson, C.Y. (1995) "Power and relationship commitment: their impact on marketing channel member performance", **Journal of Retailing**, Vol 7 No 4, pp. 363-392.
- Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C. and Grønhaug, K. (2002) **Qualitative Marketing Research**, Sage, London.
- Das, H.T. (1983) "Qualitative Research in Organisational Behaviour", **Journal of Management Studies**, Vol. 20 No 3, pp. 301-314. Cited in Carson, D., A. Gilmore, C. Perry and K. Grønhaug (2002) **Qualitative Marketing Research**, Sage, London.
- Dickson, G.W. (1966) "An analysis of vendor selection systems and decisions", **Journal of Purchasing**, Vol 2 No 1, pp. 28-41.
- Donaldson, B. (1996) "Industrial marketing relationships and open-to-tender contracts – co-operation or competition?", **Journal of Marketing Practice: applied marketing science**, Vol 2 No 2, pp. 23-34.
- Evanschitzky, H., Gopalkrishnan, R.I., Plassmann, H., Niessing, J. & Meffert, H. (2006) "The relative strength of affective commitment in securing loyalty in service relationships", **Journal of Business Research**, Vol 59, pp. 1207-1213.
- Gilliland, D.I. & Bello, D.C. (2002) "Two sides of attitudinal commitment: the effect of calculative and loyalty commitment on enforcement mechanisms in distribution channels", **Journal the Academy of Marketing Science**, Vol 30 No 1, pp. 24-44.
- Gounaris, S. (2005) "Trust and commitment influences on customer retention: insights from business-to-business services", **Journal of Business Research**, Vol 58, pp. 126-140.
- Gustafsson, A., Johnson, M.D. & Roos, I. (2005) "Relationship Commitment Dimensions, and Triggers on Customer Retention", **Journal of Marketing**, Vol 69, pp. 210-218.
- Johanson, J. (1989) "Business relationships and industrial networks", **Perspectives on the economics of organization: Cranford lectures 1**, Institute of Economic Research. Lund University press.
- Kanter, R.M. (1968) "Commitment and social organization: a study of commitment mechanisms in utopian communities", **American Sociological Review**, Vol 33 No 4, pp. 499-517.
- Kelly, S. (2004) "Measuring attitudinal commitment in business-to-business channels", **Marketing Intelligence & Planning**, Vol 22 No 6-7, pp. 636-651.
- Konovsky, M.A. & Cropanzano, R. (1996) "Perceived fairness of employee drug testing as a predictor of employee attitudes and job performance", **Journal of Applied Psychology**, Vol 76, pp. 689-707.
- Masella, C. & Rangone, A. (2000) "A contingent approach to the design of vendor selection systems for different types of co-operative customer/supplier relationships", **International Journal of Operations & Production Management**, Vol 20 No 1, pp. 70-84.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, M. (1994) "Qualitative Data Analysis". 2nd ed., Sage.
- Morgan, R. & Hunt, S. (1994) "The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing", **Journal of Marketing**, Vol 58, pp. 20-38.
- Puto, C.P., Patton, W.E. & King, R.H. (1985) "Risk handling strategies in industrial vendor selection decisions", **Journal of Marketing**, Vol 49, pp. 89-98.
- de Ruyter, K., Moorman, L. & Lemmink, J. (2001) "Antecedents of commitment and trust in customer-supplier relationships in high technology markets", **Industrial Marketing Management**, Vol 30, pp. 271-286.
- Sharma, N., Young, L. & Wilkinson, I. (2006) "The commitment mix: dimensions of commitment in international trading relationships in India", **Journal of International Marketing**, Vol 14 No 3, pp. 64-91.
- Sheth, J.N. (1977) "Recent developments in organizational buying behavior", in **Consumer and Industrial Buying Behavior**, Sheth, J.N. & Bennett, P.D., eds., North-Holland, New York, pp. 17-34.
- Snijders, C. & Tazelaar, F. (2005) "Five counterintuitive findings in IT-Purchasing", **Journal of Purchasing & Supply Management**, Vol 11, pp. 83-96.
- Svensson, G. (2004) "Supplier segmentation in the automotive industry: A dyadic approach of a managerial model", **International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management**, Vol 34 No 1, pp. 12-38.
- Teas, K.R. & McElroy, J.C. (1986) "Causal attributions and expectancy estimates: a framework for understanding the dynamics of salesforce motivation", **Journal of Marketing**, Vol 50, pp. 75-86.
- Walter, A., Mueller, T.A., Helfret, G. & Ritter, T. (2003) "Functions of industrial supplier relationships and their impact on relationship quality", **Industrial Marketing Management**, Vol 32 No 2, pp. 159-169.

- Weber, C.A., Benton, Current, J.R. & Benton W.C. (1991) "Vendor selection criteria and methods", **European Journal of Operational Research**, Vol 50 No 1, pp. 2-18.
- Weber, C.A. (1996) "A data development analysis approach to measuring vendor performance, **Supply Chain Management**, Vol 1 No 1, pp. 28-39.
- Weber, C.A., Current, J.R. & Desai, A. (2000) "An optimization approach to determining the number of vendors to employ", **Supply Chain Management: An International Journal**, Vol 5 No 2, pp. 90-98.
- Wiener, Y. (1982) "Commitment in organizations: a normative view", **Academy of Management Review**, Vol 7 No 3, pp. 418-428.
- Wilson, D. (1995) "An integrated model of buyer-seller relationships", **Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science**, Vol 23 No 4, pp. 335-345.
- Wilson, D. (2000) "Deep relationships: the case of the vanishing salesperson", **Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management**, Vol 20 No 1, pp. 53-61.
- EU CIRD manual** (2003), accessible at <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/cirdmanual/CIRD92850.htm>), online 27.03.2008.