

# **What stimulates business actors to promote others' business without monetary rewards?**

## **Exploratory narrative research on motivation factors**

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### **Abstract**

*Business actors can promote others' business by offering introductions, by providing positive word-of mouth and referrals, by building positive reputation and being as reference customers. The existing literature does not discuss why these 'promoters' facilitate others' business without monetary incentives. The scattered prior literature suggests some motivation factors such as reciprocity, social controlling and self involvement. In this paper we identify and analyze various motivation factors that explain why 'promoters' facilitate business between other business actors. The study presents a data-driven categorization on motivation factors on the basis of exploratory narrative research. The study contributes by identifying four motivation factor categories and numerous subcategories. The data-driven findings are related to motivation and social psychology, word-of-mouth literature, reference literature, and social and industrial network literature. The study offers a basis for further research in the area.*

**Keywords: motivation, word-of-mouth, references, reputation**

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Business relations seldom start from cold calls and direct approaches but with assistance of other business actors who introduce matching parties, provide positive word-of-mouth statements and referrals, build positive reputation and are also willing to be presented as reference customers or reference partners (for example Wheeler, 1987; Helfert & Vith, 1999; Salminen & Möller, 2006; Ritter, 2000). In these cases, other business actors with their relations and experience contribute and facilitate the emergence of new business relations. Concepts such as introductions, references, referrals, recommendations, word-of-mouth, reputation, and testimonials are activities where external promoters' business without monetary rewards.

Existing literature shows the variety of how business actors can serve as 'promoters' and 'facilitators'. The promoting actors can initiate international business: Ellis (2000) found that the most of initiations in foreign market entry were facilitated by middlemen who brought the potential transacting parties together because of their existing relations. Batonda and Perry (2003) found that relationship development and especially initiation can be triggered and impacted by the external parties; when business actors seek potential partners, external parties can be information sources, and also the initial contact can be made through introduction by a trusted third party. Similar kind of findings have been reported by Holmen et al. (2005) who studied a case in printing industry and discovered that some initiations can be launched by mediators. Also Ritter (2000) sees that an introduction by a third party or a reference can have positive effect in emerging network relations. Mainela (2007) found that managers proactively used third-party relationships in creating new business because social contacts provided a door-opening function and initial assessment of a possible partner.

The relevance of these kinds of external promoters is based on two main functions: promoters facilitate initiation and development of business relationship by sharing experiential information about business actors and by mediating contacts with others. The positive contribution of 'promoters' is based on connectedness and credibility effect. Because of connectedness, existing relations might have an effect on creating and developing other relations (Håkansson and Snehota, 1995; Ritter, 2000) and through mediation and access effects, promoters can use their relations in order to facilitate emergence of new business between other actors. Secondly, external 'facilitators' or 'promoters' are usually considered credible. Because they are relatively external of the focal situation but possess experience and information, they are able to provide objective views on the opportunities of new business. For example, referrals and reputation originate from relatively external independent sources, and therefore they are considered more credible and trustworthy than firm-based promotional efforts (Grönroos 2000, Herriot, 1992; Wheeler, 1987; Yoon et al., 1993; Salminen, 1996).

As a consequence of the information and existing relations that promoters possess, they are able to support the seller party in selling, prospecting and approaching customer or marketing communication (e.g. Yavas et al., 2004; Waller et al., 2001; Moncrief & Marshall, 2005; Salminen & Möller, 2006; Jaramillo & Marshall, 2004). 'Promoters' can also assist and support the customer in information search and evaluation (e.g. Johnston & Lewin, 1996; Nebus 2006), or other counterparts in finding and approaching potential partners (e.g. Ellis, 2000; Mainela, 2007; Batonda & Perry 2003).

Promoting actors are labeled in the literature as bridges (Smith & Laage-Hellman, 1995), mediators (Ritter, 2000), go-betweens (Uzzi, 1997), connectors (Uzzi & Dunlup, 2005), door openers (Halinen and Salmi, 2001; Mainela, 2007) or relationship promoters (Walter, 1999). In B-to-C literature, these kinds of promoting actors are for example various "reference persons" and word-of-mouth-sources, such as market mavens and opinion leaders (Feick and Price, 1987; Walsh et al., 2004). Promoting business actors can be persons or organizations, and their activities can be based on social or economic-based relations. The most often examined promoting parties are satisfied existing customers, but many other actors, like colleagues, other related firms and non-profit agencies can also facilitate creation and development of new business.

It can be asked why external actors promote others' business by introducing, referencing and spreading word-of-mouth. Previous literature has discussed how reward systems can sometimes motivate actors to share their information and relations (Ryu & Feick, 2007). However, there are also other reasons than direct monetary rewards to act this way. Reciprocity is seen as one motivation factor for example to spread word-of-mouth (Payne et al., 2005; Wheeler, 1987) and also social control stimulates actors to share their experiences on good or bad performance of other actors (cf. Nunlee, 2005). Some ideas for motivation factors can be found from existing word-of-mouth literature within B-to-C markets: word-of-mouth spreaders are found to be motivated because of feeling duty to advise, enjoying advising and rewarding the service provider (Goodey & East, 2008; Walsh et al., 2004). Feeling competence and enhancement of own personal reputation (Hars & Ou, 2001; Wasko & Faraj, 2005) can also stimulate actions.

In this paper, the motives of network actors to promote others' business will be investigated further. *The purpose of the paper* is to explore and analyze the motivation factors that stimulate externals to facilitate creating and developing business relations between other actors without monetary incentives. This paper concentrates only on the positive side of the phenomenon and on the motivation factors that stimulate actors to promote others' business even if they do not get direct monetary compensation.

Through abductive narrative research the motivation factors are explored through narrative research that is conducted among b-to-b professional service industries. The study is data-driven, and through a data-driven analysis we will discuss the motivation factors of external promoting actors. Existing literature is used as a pool of impetus and a grounding of categorizations, not as a framework. Thus the role of theories is to support identification of the motivation factor categories, but the final categorization is driven from the data.

The study uses *professional business* services as a research context, because externals play various promoter and facilitator roles in this kind of context: Externals are information sources for buyers, since buyers of services utilize trustworthy information sources to reduce risk and uncertainty (for example Lapierre, 1997; Day & Barksdale, 2003; Mitchell, 1998; Henthorne et al., 1993). Active push-marketing and marketing communication like advertising of professional services has been seen as a negative action that reduces levels of expertise and professionalism (Feldman Barr & McNeilly, 2003; Thakor & Kumar, 2000; Waller, 2001; Boles et al., 1997; Johnson et al., 1998). Instead, word-of-mouth, referrals and introductions are important practices to gain new business (for example Waller et al., 2001). Thus, external promoting actors are crucial especially for professional services since they can be considered as neutral and "non-pushing" business facilitators. This attitude is assumed to be applicable to other business contexts and industries, too.

The study aims to contribute by identifying and analyzing the motivation factors that stimulate business actors to promote other network actors' business. The paper will utilize literature of several research areas: motivation and social psychology, IMP-literature, literature concerning references, referrals, recommendations, word-of-mouth, reputation and service marketing literature, especially professional business services.

The structure of the paper is the following: first, the promoting actors and their motivation to promote others' business without monetary rewards are defined and reviewed in the literature. Secondly the methodology and research design are presented. Thirdly, motives of promoting actors are discussed through dialog between empirical data and relevant literature. On the basis of this dialog, we propose new conceptual categorizations for motivation factors and related them to existing literature. Finally, theoretical contribution and managerial implications are discussed.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

Although reward systems can sometimes motivate actors to share their information for potential customers (Ryu & Feick, 2007), still for example the existence of word-of-mouth indicates that there are also other reasons to spread positive messages than direct monetary rewards. Actors invest their own reputation and gained relationships when acting such a way (see Johnsson, 1998), so they need to have a strong motivation to promote others' business. There supposedly are several non-monetary motivation factors that stimulate actors to promote others' business by introducing, referencing and spreading word-of-mouth and positive reputation although they do not gain clear monetary pay back. Some non-monetary motivation factors can be identified within various literature streams. Previous literature has stressed reciprocity as a motivation factor to spread word-of-mouth (for example Payne et al., 2005; Wheeler, 1987). Social controlling can be related to the topic; people are motivated to build and spread reputation because these kinds of activities control the business environment (Nunlee, 2005).

Some ideas for motivation factors can be found from the existing word-of-mouth literature on b-to-c and b-to-b fields. Helm (2000) has studied customer referrals and motives for recommendations. In B-to-C markets, market mavens spread word-of mouth because they feel a duty to advise, they enjoy advising, they want to reward the service provider, they are happy about the product or are confirming their own choice or they want to help the recipient of advice (Goodey and East 2008). Goodey and East (2008) mention that motivation for spreading word-of-mouth can also originate product involvement, self involvement and self confirmation: word-of-mouth spreaders gain attention by having something to advice and assert superiority over the listeners, or they are involved to provide knowledge regarding a particular topic. Walsh et al. (2004) found three main motivation categories for market maven activities: obligation to share information, pleasure in sharing information and desire to help others. Firstly, obligation to share information is based on thinking that members of social networks increase one's sense of duty of obligation to the community and help others with their better knowledge. Secondly, actors pass on information because they find it intrinsically satisfying or because they want to share their joy about a successful buy. Thirdly, some spread information to help others

because it might be useful in reducing others' purchase risk or in saving others the costs of acquiring and processing information; in such cases actors aim to help others with their buying decision and to save them from negative experiences.

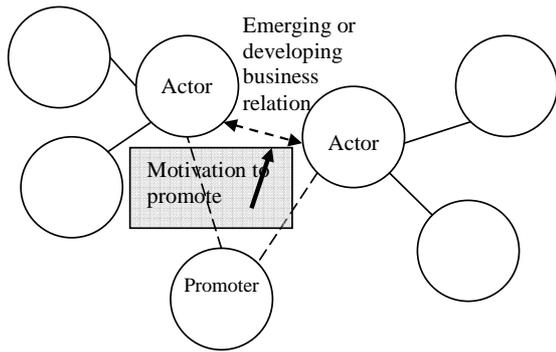
Another interesting field related to motives of promoters can be found outside of marketing literature. Literature concerning experts' motivation to share their information within open source projects and virtual communities surprisingly discusses on similar motivation factors. Hars and Ou (2001) discuss two types of motivations that account for people's participation in open source projects: the first category includes internal factors and intrinsic motivation such as the desire of feeling competence and self-determination. The second category focuses on external rewards and expected future return such as direct or indirect monetary compensation or other's recognition. Intrinsic motivation occurs when the experts were motivated by the feeling of competence, satisfaction and fulfillment that arises because the person can increase the welfare of others and thirdly community identification, since programmers may identify themselves as part of the community. (Hars and Ou, 2001). External motivation occurs when for example open source programmers are motivated by external indirect rewards, such as increasing their marketability and skill base, self-marketing, such as to demonstrate their capability and skillfulness and thirdly, peer recognition that is based on desire of fame and esteem. Wasko and Faraj (2005) found that expert individuals help strangers in electronic networks when they perceive that it enhances their professional reputations. They also found that advices and information sharing occur without expectations of reciprocity from others, because in network-based interactions, the knowledge sharing may be generalized than dyadic, and thus direct reciprocity is not necessary for sustaining collective action. Instead, the reciprocity is more generalized in the network (Wasko & Faraj 2005).

Motivation to facilitate other's business can also be linked to social capital (for example Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Butler & Purchase, 2008), since favors can then be linked to use and renewal of social capital. In horizontal relationships particularly, people who belong to the same situation and social group, are committed to giving favors to others by providing advice, assistance and information (Butler & Purchase, 2008). In horizontal relationships, business actors keep in contact with actors at the same hierarchical level because such contacts (previous work contacts, previous fellow students) assist fulfilling current work commitments and offer an access to both resources and information that can improve their current situation, since these direct connections improve the efficiency of resource flows (Butler & Purchase, 2008).

Psychology considers motivation as one of the subjective phenomena such as mental representations (Birnberg et al., 2007) and thus especially motivation psychology and social psychology theories can provide more understanding on motives. Motivation psychology theories address different aspect of motivation (Birnberg et al., 2007). *The level of aspiration theory* assumes that people are motivated by a desire to experience feelings of success and avoid feelings of failure (Weiner, 1989). Success at a difficult task is more attractive than success at an easy task. (Birnberg et al., 2007). *The goal-setting theory* is related to level of aspiration theory and both are based on Lewin's field theory, which models individuals as desiring to have goals, choosing goals, and being motivated to reach these goals (Weiner, 1989). According to these theories, for example giving a referral could be considered as a task and motivation could then be related to person's aim to succeed in the given task. *The cognitive dissonance theory* assumes that individuals want consistency between their cognitions and their behavior (Shaw & Costanzo, 1982) and in such case when they experience cognitive dissonance; they aim to reduce this tension by changing their cognitions, so that their cognitions are consistent. For example individuals are motivated to reduce post-decision cognitive dissonance by increasing positive cognitions about the chosen alternative or decreasing their positive cognitions about the rejected alternatives in order to strengthen the alternative chosen, rather than the rejected alternatives. *The equity theory* assumes that people are motivated to maintain a balance in exchange relationships, and assess this balance by comparing their inputs and outcomes to others' inputs and outcomes and assumes a difference between what ought to be and what is.

Social psychology theories are concerned with how individuals' minds and behavior are influenced by other people (Taylor et al., 2003; Shaw & Costanzo, 1982). *Role theory* explains and predicts how people function in a social context. This theory assumes that individuals' behavior is influenced by role expectations and norms that concern how individuals in a particular role are expected to behave (e.g. as a supervisor or a worker). *Social identity theory* suggests that individuals categorize their social world into in-groups and out-groups. They derive self-esteem from their social identity as a member of an in-group, and their self-concept depends on how they evaluate their in-group relative to other groups (Tajfel, 1982). Social identity rises from a self-categorization process in which individuals group themselves with others on the basis of similarities. Social identification with a group influences, how an individual interacts with another member of the group, interpret information about the group, and make decisions that affect the groups (Lembke and Wilson, 1998). The more an individual socially identifies with a group, the more the individual focuses on the group's

outcomes instead of their own outcomes (Brewer, 1979) and the more likely they contribute public good to the group and behave more co-operatively (Wit and Wilke, 1992).



Motivation factors in scattered literature:	
product involvement	self involvement
self confirmation	obligation to share information
reciprocity	pleasure in sharing information
desire to help others	social controlling
collective actions	indirect monetary rewards

**Figure 1 Motivation factors identified within literature**

The various motivation factors can be driven from the scattered literature concerning the phenomenon. The main types of motivations are remarked and illustrated in the figure 1. The diverse literature stresses various dimensions of motivation factors. The promoters might for example be stimulated by positive emotions and satisfaction or by social obligations.

### 3 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to study business actors' motivation to contribute and promote others' business, qualitative research was conducted. Empiric data of the study consists of active theme interviews including the episodic narratives of the initiation of business relationships. The reference material of case organizations are used as secondary data. 41 interviews were conducted during summer 2005—winter 2008. The informants varied from entrepreneurs to top managers. Professional services were used as research context, and those who were representing the sellers were from various professional service industries such as design, industrial design, advertising, interpreting and localization, engineering consulting, landscape consulting, software engineering and consulting, accounting, and corporate banking.

The informants were chosen by means of theoretical sampling, i.e. on the basis of the expected level of new insights they could bring to the developing theory (Flick 1998). The companies range from micro-sized entrepreneurial enterprises to large international firms. The first contact was usually with the seller, and after that the buyers or referees mentioned were contacted.

We used focused episodic interviews (Flick, 1998). In narrative interviews, structured "interview guide" in traditional sense is not used, instead, the narrative interview begin with a generative narrative question, that refers the topic of the study in order to simulate the interviewee's main narrative (Flick 2002). Questions in the usual sense of the word were not asked, and instead the interviewer periodically invited the informant to present narratives concerning events and chains of situations that were relevant for the topic. In this study, the primary intention was to inspire informants to produce episodic narratives about promotional activities of external actors with open invitations to narrate, like "you mentioned that you colleague recommended you to them, could you tell me more about this". As a consequence, informants of this study produced long and rich narrations on promoters' activities and on reasons why they facilitated the situation. The chosen method enabled informants to illustrate various situations and freely describe their actions and reasons which allowed new categories to emerge. Questions about each company's history, offerings, markets and business practices in general were also posed. According to Flick (2002, 109) "episodic interviews seek to exploit the advantages of both the narrative interview and the semi-structured interview", since narrative parts provide an approach to

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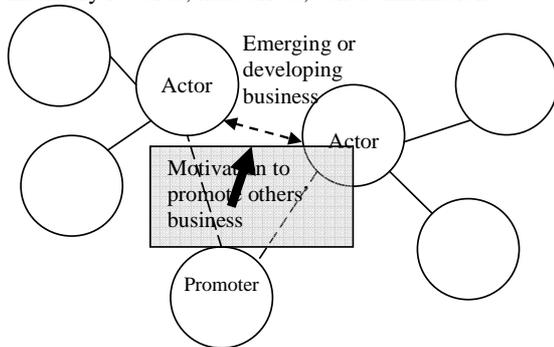
the experiences relevant for the subject under study and with the key questions concerning the situations, the interviewer has more options to direct the interview. Flick (2002) emphasizes that open interview and episodic interviews are clearly separate methods, because of interviewers “not-asking” role and the structure of narratives. Each interview lasted about one and a half hours, and they were all tape-recorded and transcribed.

The principles of abductive research were followed; the data collection and analysis and the search for complementary theories were parallel iterative processes (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). The dialogue between the empirical data and the theory guided the analysis, even if the data had the decisive role. The literature was used to identify emergent themes in the data. The aim of the analysis was to build and broaden the existing conceptual understanding of motivation factors. Because of the strong empirical foundation and the large amount of data, we used QSR NVivo software in the analysis. We started with open coding but changed to selective coding after further reading. During the coding process, also free nodes were created when they seemed important and thus some purely data-driven categories emerged.

On the basis of the interview data analysis, four different types of main motivation categories emerged. They differ from each other on the basis of the bias. Each category was divided further into more distinctive categories. In the next section, the identified categories are presented and illustrated with citations to improve the validation of the analysis.

#### 4 FINDINGS

On the basis of data analysis, four kinds of motivation factors were identified. The data revealed that the motivation to contribute others’ business can be biased to the seller party, buyer party or the external promoting actor itself. The main identified motivation categories are the following: firstly, motivation to develop markets: keeping competition sharp, facilitating new entrances with new offerings; secondly, relational motivation towards seller the party: satisfaction, partnership, advocacy or goodwill; thirdly, collective motivation towards the seller or the buyer party: social control, reciprocity, social reward, mentoring, involvement on the common topic, liking; fourthly, individual, self-interested motivation: indirect monetary rewards, halo effect, self-confirmation.



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- Identified motivation factors:**
- Motivation to develop markets: keeping competition sharp, facilitating new entrances with new offerings.
  - Relational motivation towards the seller party: satisfaction, advocacy, goodwill, partnership
  - Collective motivation towards seller or buyer party: social control, reciprocity, social reward, mentoring, involvement on the common topic, liking, duty to help peer
  - Individual, self-interested motivation: indirect monetary rewards, halo effect, self-confirmation

**Figure 2 Motivation factors to promote others’ business identified within the data**

These identified categories (see the figure 2) are deepened and illustrated in the following with empirical illustrations and the narrower categories are proposed.

## 4.1 Motivation to develop markets

The first main motivation category addresses to developing markets: the promoters were stimulated by motivations such as keeping competition sharp and facilitating new entrances with new offerings.

### Keeping competition sharp

Some promoters told that they wanted to keep competition sharp and allocate work for new entrants, and therefore they introduced new suppliers to potential customers. In the following, the promoter tells why she referred a new translation agency to an advertising agency.

*R was using quite a few translation agencies, which were over-employed. Many times agencies had to tell them that they could not serve them within required schedules. This new agency S has good references and a lot of resources, and because they entered to local markets, they ought to get their fare share. They get to show, what they can do. This was the idea in the light of I decided to recommend S to R.*

Some promoters wanted to control current prices by facilitating new entrances and competition. The following citation describes how the senior designer used his status, relations and power to help his students to enter in design business, because according to his opinion, the customer reached equal services at lower price when it started to use services of these new-comers.

*I told those representatives of the company to get rid of that advertising agency. It costs too much. Let's take this student here and that student there. They have taken care of concerns graphical communications, and websites and all of that. They were kind of my own students, who took over when they were about to graduate. And then they carried on. Now they have their own offices.*

### Facilitating new entrances with new offerings

Sometimes promoters wanted to develop markets by facilitating new entrances with new offerings. In these cases, they referred new type of services produced by new entrants, since they saw that markets could use such services more. In the following an architect has recommended services of design oriented landscape consulting in order to develop the markets:

*Then he (architect) said that they had needed this service for long. Nobody had ever said that a service like this existed.*

And as a consequence, the architect as a promoter recommended these services of design oriented landscape consulting further, and introduced the new agency also for other similar design oriented business actors on the field.

Motivation to develop markets-type of motivation factors was strongly related to situations, where new entrants were introduced to their potential customers and gained their first important customers, and thus were able to build their customer base.

## 4.2 Relational motivation and satisfaction towards seller party: satisfaction

The second motivation factor addresses to good relation with the seller party: promoters are satisfied, they feel partnership or experience advocacy and goodwill towards the seller party.

### Satisfaction, advocacy and dedication

Satisfaction and advocate experiences stimulated actors to enhance business of sellers with good performance. In the following, the promoter was motivated to recommend an engineering agency on the basis of continual satisfaction towards recommended agency:

*There isn't a project of any kind, which would have gone terribly wrong. Sure, if something would go bad, things would be different.*

This factor is noted also in the literature: satisfaction and desire to share with others the benefits enjoyed has been seen as a motivation factor since Dichter (1966). Word of mouth behavior has been seen as a result and outcome of satisfaction perceived by the customer, and literature widely see that customer satisfaction induces customer behavior, such as free word-of-mouth advertising, (Luo & Homburg, 2007). In professional services satisfaction towards expertise, politeness, punctuality and ethics have motivated referees (Johnsson et al., 1998; Wheeler 1987).

Loyal customers are not always satisfied and willing to be references or word-of-sources, but if they feel satisfaction, they are more willing to promote, as this citation illustrates:

*Recommendations are given out by the people who are in charge of product development and management, and with whom we have succeeded.*

### **Partnership**

Motivation can also be linked to partnership and the willingness to develop the partner's business but partnership-motivation was not strongly indicated in the data. However, for example Ruokolainen (2007) sees that communicating the commitment of the reference customer can be regarded as a signal for the other players in the market to join in developing the business of the company, for example start-up technology company.

## **4.3 Collective motivation towards seller or buyer party**

Sometimes the motivation of promoters is based on collectiveness, and various reasons linked to collective motivation was distinguished: social control and reward, reciprocity, mentoring, liking and involvement on the common topic.

### **Social control and reward**

Referrals can be seen as social contract –buyers and seller both must perform and behave better, since they have a common contact that spread positive evaluations (Money 2002). Social controlling and rewarding is potentially founded on collectiveness of business actors. People tell success and failure stories and the ultimate goal of sharing this information is to warn about failure or to cheer success (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). By sharing information about past activities, people give guidelines to others, and thus reputation can even be seen as a social control mechanism, that guides individuals and firms to choose successful actors, and to avoid unsuccessful and untrustworthy ones (Nunlee, 2005; Larson, 1992).

Even if the previous literature sees reputation and word as control mechanism and this view stresses especially social controlling with negative tones, but the findings of this study pointed out them as positive reward mechanisms. This stresses the positive sides of the phenomenon: instead of social control, positive social rewarding was an important motivation factor and the promoter wanted to improve business of actors that they themselves had founded sound, smooth and decent and thus wanted socially reward them.

*In my opinion it was a great idea that an international translation agency comes here and puts up a business. I thought they were really nice and perky. I thought they had a fabulous idea and everything, so I thought, I should compliment them to others. Nowadays we seem to get only bad news of companies leaving, so it's nice to encourage a new company when it's starting up.*

The social reward mechanism realizes also when the promoter appreciates the professional's expertise and with promotional activities wants to attend their excellent skills.

*If a client asks me, who's a good industrial designer, a good designer or who's up for making this product package or whatever, I can count on this network and honestly recommend them. They're really the top. Cause that's the thing in recommending – if you recommend someone who's inferior, you lose your own reputation. That's kind of a key aspect here too.*

### **Involvement in the same topic or vision**

Data indicated that community of experts or entrepreneurs motivated promoters to promote business of same-minded business actors, who shared the same values and visions. Individual values were usually embedded to institutional or organizational values; individual actors promoted a firm because they shared values with a particular individual within the firm or the strategy and values of the firm were alike. For example designers wanted to promote design and design oriented architect wanted to promote design oriented landscaping agency.

*Sometimes colleagues can also be these third parties who work as recommenders, 'cause at times they can't take the job themselves, for example 'cause they're working for the competitor or something like that, whatever may be the reason. So once in a while they might recommend their rival also. Designers seem to have this common feel of importance that designing is generally used. So it's not necessarily so dangerous, if you don't have the time or ability to do it yourself, but instead it's nice to see that at least someone else does. That's why it's of course important to have the recognition of the experts of your own field too.*

The promotion is not altruistic by nature; instead promoting activities of actors tended to enhance business of same minded business people and networked complementary suppliers, like the following citation shows:

*When someone in your network of acquaintances has managed to get a good client as a web client, industrial designing client or as an advertisement client, they then naturally try to sell it back to their own network.*

### **Reciprocity**

Reciprocity was one of the major motivation factors. Referrals for instance can be viewed as reciprocated favors from one colleague to another, where the referee, according to the equity view of exchange, expects to receive similar favor in the future from the referred. In reciprocity there are no formal devices to enforce each other.

*We helped this Irish consult to get in touch with VTT and these authorities in Oulu. Then later he took us for example to talk to the marketing leaders of Europe at the Pelica exhibition, which was a big exhibition. That's where we got access to these actors and got their e-mail addresses.*

Reciprocity is also mentioned in the literature (Payne et al., 2005; Uzzi, 1997). Sometimes reciprocity was linked to favors between friends and acquaintances.

*That recommendation was favor in return. If you give a hand today, it will pay back tomorrow. Okay, the person knows yet another person and so on. Yeah I've always hoped the best for everyone close to me.*

Sometimes the reciprocity occurred between related service providers within the industry. In the following case, a CEO from business bank describes how law agencies, accountants and banks do informal co-operation since the members of "referral networks" promote each others business reciprocally.

*When you get to think about a contact network like this with the law firms and the account agencies and the account examination agencies, of course they are consciously formed. We draw up a well working connection with them, with the devious thought that their new clients would choose us as their bank. That's natural. It profits us. I think everyone else does it too. It's very common and it's a win win situation without a doubt. Both of the parties must feel that way 'cause the initiative could come from either one of them. They get new clients this way too.*

However, Wheeler (1987) found that reciprocity is not important for referees themselves. This can be understood following way: reciprocity is not a sufficient condition to refer and there is no automatic referral-trade-offs, no referral for referral mechanisms. Instead, referrals and references are earned, when truly criteria concerning good performance, offerings and compatibility are achieved

*I'm do not recommend whoever, instead it works precisely that way that I recommend only the ones I consider to be the best. If I recommend something or someone, who's not good, it's horrifying.*

### **Liking, chemistry**

Wheiler (1987) found that the personal acquaintance is not enough to guarantee receiving referrals, because professionals making referrals to other professional place the greatest emphasis on expertise, qualification, ethics and punctuality. However, the data of this study indicated that liking and good chemistry between the promoter and the reference/referred is important and is linked to other motivation factors: liking is a basic motivation criteria but however it needed also other motivation factors. In the following, the liking between the promoter and the promoted actor was linked to industry involvement and shared visions.

*Also personal chemistry counts. I consider this architect to be a great guy and so on. I believe that it runs both ways, that both of us feel that we're alike and it's marvelous to do these kinds of projects.*

### **Mentoring**

The data suggests that also mentoring role inspired promoters. For example, more experienced actors identified themselves with some less experienced actors and because their position was already established, they wanted to support business of some new-comers. For example seniors promoted similar juniors and advanced experts in a particular field acted as mentors for less experienced experts. Mentoring roles within networks are mentioned by Uzzi (1997). In the following citation, mentoring was linked to shared visions and liking.

*One architect got exited. Through him we've got plenty of work. He has recommend us for example to this Design Partners –exhibition. There he introduced us to more people. He has himself started up in a small, very modest company. With this activity and passion to the job he has stepped up and now their firm is doing really well. Once he even said something like that he saw a lot of himself in us 'cause we also have this fire to this and we're sort of active. In my mind we sort of strive forward.*

Similarly, communication agency's representative who acted as a referee described how she shared her experiences further and referred the translation agency to an advertising agency because she had experienced similar difficulties when she started her business: *Company S [translation agency] was a new actor on markets, and I wanted to help them to get contacts. I know from personal experience, how hard it is to get new contacts when you start up. It would have been nice to have someone at your side saying that 'you're doing a good job and that I could recommend you'. So, I thought I can recommend them to others. The challenge here in Turku area is that it's really hard to get in when you're new. The contacts play a key role around here.*

The mentoring was not usually based on reciprocity, and mentor-promoters didn't expect reciprocal favors from juniors.

*As a senior I was the one who had gathered that group and got them work. That's how it goes, but I haven't yet found*

*myself in a situation, where one of them would have called me back.*

Sometimes these mentors supported lacking marketing skills of professionals. In the following narration, the CEO of an advertising agency describes how he was motivated to support the designer's negotiations concerning initiations, since he saw that the designer was good in designing, but poor in marketing, but the CEO himself instead was used to negotiating and marketing.

*Lauri is an extremely skilful industrial designer, but he's in no means a sales person or a negotiator. He doesn't necessarily know how to bring up his expertise very well. So we, as in I and Mika Kiiskinen, who's our creative director and my business partner – we were with him in almost every business meeting that he went to in the beginning. Lauri is this extremely nervous person, who almost can't hold a coffee cup. Then again, cause I have years and years negotiated with all kinds of marketing leaders, it seems simple to me.*

#### **Duty, joy and privilege to assist “peer” in problem solving due to expert and specialist skills**

Sometimes the motivation emerged from duty or joy to assist less experienced actors in problem solving. Sometimes a question and advice-seeking behavior from a buyer party triggered an opportunity to show own expertise and therefore the promoter reactively guided the advice-seeker who sought information on suitable offerings and potential service providers. The data showed photographers, engineers, designers, CEOs of banks etc. felt duty to assist a “peer” in problem solving situation related to initiation.

*I was selling this Elomatic to them and gave them some contact information. I asked them to call there because I think they have the best know-how in this line of business 'cause they have partly designed our oat mill to Nokia. Then they had also one project in Russia, so I knew that they have skills and proposed it. I knew that there was a lot of work put in to it, and that they had to speed it up in some things.*

In service industries particularly, customers who have experience and knowledge about the provider, can serve as mentors to other customers (Gremler & Brown, 1999), and so the mentoring and duty to guide the less experience buyers was also found from the data.

#### **4.4 Individual, self-interested motivation: indirect monetary rewards, halo effect, self-confirmation**

The fourth main category emphasizes the motivation factors that emerge from self-interested motivation. Even if sharing experiences was based on good will and reciprocity towards the information seeker or the referred, the information sharing was not altruistic by nature. Instead, promoters gained different kind of compensations for their activities besides the potential reciprocal favors. The non-monetary incentives were such as self-confirmation and power establishment, halo effect, and indirect monetary rewards.

##### **Power establishment, self-confirmation:**

One motivation factor was related to self-confirmation and expert power establishment. By acting promoters and mediators, actors established their power, and legitimated their expert status, like the following remark from a promoter implies:

*Of course, if I have some good contacts, I can and I will also use them.*

Access to information and the knowledge is related to power, since it is achieved through positions and roles and it can be considered as a currency that is not given away (see Dawes et al. 2000). In this kind of cases the motivation was based on expert role legitimating. Self-confirmation can be found from Dichter (1966) who saw that the product experience confirms the source to reassure himself in front of others.

Power establishment can also be linked to other motivation factors: power establishment can be related to social rewarding. The following note from the seller party from banking industry shows how the promoters are sometimes proud when they are asked to be a reference customer. The person or organization can appreciate this recognition and status, since their crucial position as a reference customer put them in an important role in the initiation.

*Once in a while I say to a customer that 'by the way', if a situation comes up, can I mention that you're a reference. Normally they say 'of course, of course'. Many of them take it very personally and it's important to them to be a recommender.*

##### **Halo-effect, prestige**

In some cases the promoter was motivated to promote other business, since their own reputation was improved or grown, if it was linked to the focal organizations with good reputation and status. In the citation shows, how some “customers” want to be reference customers and they want to mentioned and linked to

service providers with good reputation, since they gain halo-effect and this linking shifts their own reputation and business.

*For example a designer agency normally thinks that being a referent benefits them 'cause their name comes up. I know even a few agencies, who claim to be a customer of Cadmatic, although they haven't ever bought a license from us. They do this just because they think that it lifts up their image somehow. They can get new projects from their clients because of it. They think that their clients think that 'there's a forward striving, modern software using corporation', and enhance their own image with that.*

In literature are also some notions how existing network relations signal for example quality (for example Turnbull et al., 1996) or position actors in the business networks. For example reference relations with new start-up firms or innovative firms might also give a customer company an image of innovativeness valuable in some industries and help a firm to positioning itself as an innovative and creative (Gomez-Arias and Montermoso, 2007).

**Indirect monetary rewards**

Sometimes promoters gain no direct monetary compensation but some indirect monetary rewards; when the promoters boost business of their close business actors, they might gain new business for themselves later.

Sometimes, this motivation factor was linked to reciprocity: the motivation was based on an assumption that promoters gain new assignments, if they promote actors with whom they co-work. Especially complementary service providers and related networked free lancer experts mentioned that if they recommend their colleagues services, they might also gain some kind of assignment for themselves.

*I have this photographer here that I know, this Robert Seger, who's a freelancer like me. He's really good. He's the one I've always recommended. We've usually worked together. To a small actor like me it's really important to have a lot of contacts. When the business works through networks, with a lot of subcontractors and freelancers, you can find many adequate partners for different kind of projects. You easily think that 'use me in this assignment' or that 'we could together pull this job'.*

Being a reference customer, giving a testimonial statement or recommending can also be motivated because of an opportunity to promote themselves. For example, when a seller party presents their references, they at the same time present reference customers' business for various business actors and this free promotion highlights the business of reference customer as well.

*Clients surely do view reference customership very positively. An entrepreneur is always proud of his/her own work. It would seem very weird, if an entrepreneur wouldn't want to step up and make a scene of one-self. They like to tell about themselves.*

Indirect reward can be related to reciprocal benefits that are not clearly monetary, but they have value in business, such as increased flexibility. For example, the members of referral networks and reference customers may receive more flexible treatment.

*I could put it like this: the benefit that we gain (from reference customership) is usually the flexibility, which works both ways. When we're flexible to them, they are to us. Just trough this comes the gains. Being smooth in the one way and the other.*

**5 LINKING THE FINDINGS TO EXISTING THEORIES**

The motivation categories presented in the previous chapter were data-driven but the scattered theoretical background and various literature streams can be linked in these findings. Theories and conceptualizations reviewed advanced understanding and analysis of the motivation factors in business-to-business context. The identified motivation factors can then be linked to the scattered existing literature. For example, giving referrals and testimonies can be considered as reduction of cognitive dissonance; that is satisfied and networked actors pursue to strengthen their positive attitudes by testifying and telling the positive things about the actors and solutions they are tied to. Mentoring stimulated more experienced business actors to promote business of novices and this can be explained with role theory. The identified categories and matching literature and theories are linked in the table 1.

**Table 1 The data driven categories linked to theoretical conceptualizations**

Identified data driven categories	Matching theoretical groundings
Motivation to develop markets: ➤ keeping competition sharp ➤ facilitating new entrances with new offerings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market mavens motivation in b-to-c fields: to share market place information (Walsh et al. 2004)</li> </ul>
Relational motivation towards seller party:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfaction evoke word-of-mouth</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ satisfaction</li> <li>➤ partnership</li> <li>➤ advocacy or goodwill;</li> </ul>	<p>(Luo&amp;Homburg 2008) and willingness to be presented as reference customers (Salminen 1997)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting as an activity to strengthen positive attitudes and to confirm own choices (cognitive dissonance Shaw &amp; Costanzo 1982; market mavenism, Goodey &amp; East 2008)</li> </ul>
<p>Collective motivation towards seller or buyer party:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ social control</li> <li>➤ reciprocity</li> <li>➤ social reward</li> <li>➤ mentoring</li> <li>➤ involvement on the common topic</li> <li>➤ liking</li> <li>➤ assisting the peer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reputation (Nunlee 2005) or word-of-mouth (Money 2000) as social controlling mechanism</li> <li>• Reciprocity as motivation between business insiders and experts (cf. Wheeler 1987, Payne et al. 2005, Wasko &amp; Faraj 2005)</li> <li>• Role theory: expert wants to present their experiences and present themselves as experts; mentors facilitate novices business (cf. Shaw &amp; Costanzo 1982)</li> <li>• Social identity theory – rewarding the in-groups (cf. Tajfel 1982)</li> <li>• Duty to advice in market mavenism (Goodey &amp; East 2008, Walsh et al. 2004)</li> </ul>
<p>Individual, self-interested motivation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ indirect monetary rewards</li> <li>➤ halo effect</li> <li>➤ self-confirmation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-marketing of experts (cf. Hars &amp; Ou 2001)</li> <li>• Self-confirmation in market mavenism (Goodey &amp; East 2008)</li> </ul>

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

### Contribution and theoretical implications

Previous literature acknowledges how various business actors in various situations are able to facilitate creation and development of business between other business actors (for example Ellis, 2000; Ritter, 2000) through various practices such as word-of-mouth, introductions and referencing (Salminen & Möller, 2006; Wheeler, 1987; Helfert & Vith, 1999). Previous literature (for example Ritter 2000) has also outlined positive effects of relationships to other relationships in triadic settings. However, prior research does not discuss, what stimulates the actors to act this way without monetary incentives. This study contributed by exploring these factors and identifying four categories that motivates positive effects. External of business relations but internal of networks and industrial communities facilitate others' business for various reasons: some motivation factors are grounded on social triggers, such as social control or reciprocity. Another identified motivation factor group was relational, such as satisfaction towards the marketer. Some reasons seemed to be quite selfish, such as halo-effect based motivation or self-confirmation of the promoter. The findings showed that promoters have numerous non-monetary reasons to promote others' business, and thus suggested monetary compensations (for example Ruy & Feick, 2007) are not necessary. Instead, in business markets, the motivation to promote an industry's business may originate from various non-monetary or only indirectly monetary incentives. The monetary compensation in some situations can even lower the credibility and thus harm the promoting network effects.

This study also showed that many of the motivation factors identified and discussed in market mavenism literature in the b-to-c context (Goodey & East, 2008; Walsh et al. 2004) are applicable to b-to-b context.

Recognition of promoters with various motivation factors without rewarding, is a contribution that can be

applicable to various research contexts and conceptualizations, for example relationship initiations and development, network formation and various strategic situations such as market entrances and internationalization.

### **Managerial implications**

Discussion and findings on motivation of the promoter actors provide a stable basis for managerial implications on how buyers and sellers can take advantage of promoters in their business. The paper highlights implications for managers wishing to develop third party involvement as a marketing strategy without monetary compensation.

The simple recognition of the role of the promoter in initiation and development of business relationships is useful but if the managers know how to motivate promoters, these promoters become manageable assets for the firm.

Marketers should use their promoters tactfully, when they are pursuing new customers. It is important to understand, how to build promoting relationships and networks. Business actors are usually keen to develop their personal networks ensuring that they are always well connected to useful and potentially useful contacts. Because horizontal relationship and social capital are the groundings for promotional motivation, managers need to ensure that they have for example horizontal relations outside of formal organizational structures. These kinds of relations are maintained not only with managers but also with other useful individuals at the same hierarchical level, since relationships may originate from a common professional base or a common work history. To develop horizontal relations with actors within similar and complementary business, managers should attend professionally based social activities to maximize the informal nature of these relations. Knowledge of a friendship relationship between persons can be a great advantage. The key reference customers and other advocates should be activated through reciprocal and other motivation mechanisms, not through monetary rewards.

Asking an existing client to refer the professional firm to a potential client may be considered too intimidating. However if the promoter is convinced that information sharing and networking also advances the development of existing relationships and valuable industry- or market-specific information is offered as a trade, the promoter may be encouraged to act on its own initiative. At its best, the promoter may help all participating actors to take advantage of new business opportunities and enhancing relationships.

Compensation is one motivation tool but as implications of this study, this kind of monetary compensation is not necessary because there are plenty of other motivation factors, as the findings of this research revealed. Besides, the compensation can reduce the credibility of promoters. Instead, marketers should motivate the promoters by stimulating them and giving motives for conversation and information and relation sharing. However promoters also could show resistance to marketers' attempts to utilize them, with may result in the opposite effect than the one intended. Therefore the promoters should be intentionally motivated very cautiously. Marketers could use especially expert promoters' willingness to build their own expert reputation: by participating promoting nets, individuals gain reputation and become central to a larger network as industry insiders in developing knowledge exchange among network members. Marketers should focus attention on the centralized individuals with experience by using motivation factors such as enhanced reputation. Another method to promote promoters participation is to develop techniques that help build an individual's reputation in the profession.

Especially interpersonal communication and motivating has been relevant for choosing services, and therefore marketers should have interest to activate their promoters such as market mavens and experts to reach a wider market.

The following section provides examples of activities that a firm might pursue in order to leverage the motivation in such a way that encourages promoters to further acquire and deliver information to other network members. In order to activate a promoter's motivation, a firm could create promotional material that stresses the experts and industry insiders own business because this might build reciprocity. Another activity is to ask promoters to explain the benefits of using the firm's products to others, and to share market place information with others. Marketers could stress the feeling of how sharing information and relations will help other network members. Promoters could identify to the firm those individuals that might be most assisted by the firm's offerings. Another tactic is to make promoters part of a special group that receives important industry-specific information. This may activate feelings that because of their special status they have an obligation to share information with others. Also reciprocal favours to promoters may generate goodwill that may transform into referrals and positive word and willingness to be presented as reference customers, referees and advocates. The firms wishing to take advantage of promoters must develop practices that make information and relation sharing enjoyable between promoters and potential customers and provide comfortable forums that encourage promoters to interact with others. Seminars and events are good practices in this. These kinds of promoters are slow to use and relatively uncontrollable, but therefore they are also

credible in the eyes of other business actors.

#### **Future research**

This research was exploratory qualitative research on motivation factors in the b-to-b professional service industries. It is recommended that future research consider other industries, offering types and other countries. Motivation factors identified within this research can also be tested quantitatively in further studies.

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