

DO HUNGARIAN SUPPLY CHAIN MEMBERS TRUST IN EACH OTHER?

Work in progress paper

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Abstract

The aim of our paper is to investigate how Hungarian companies behave as actors of a supply chain. More exactly what is the role of trust in the business relationship between the actors of the supply chain.

From the early beginning the results of IMP researchers emphasize the key role of trust in the formulating, maintaining and developing business relationships between the buyer and the seller. The interactive model (Håkansson 1982) describes the business relationship as a weave of four different exchange episodes. Social exchange episodes mean the personal contacts between and among actors involved in a relationship. The main goal of these personal relationships (social exchange episodes) is to create, maintain and develop the mutual trust among involved persons. Without mutual trust a business cannot work, neither born.

Later IMP researches more deeply underline the fundamental role of trust. Trust is not only important to exclude the market and environment uncertainty but to help both parties to deal with these uncertainties (Håkansson et al 2009).

Based on an empirical study realised in Hungary in the framework of an international comparative research we examine the behaviour of more than 300 companies in their supply chains. Data collection has been finished some weeks ago. In this working-progress paper we would like to present the very first result of this study in the group of micro-sized entrepreneurships.

Keywords: supply chain management, trust, empirical findings about Hungary, micro entrepreneurships

1. Introduction

Management needs to choose what level of partnership appropriate for particular supply chain links (Lambert, Emmelhainz and Gardner 1996) because not each relationship throughout the supply chain should be closely coordinated and integrated. The most appropriate relationship is the one that best fits the specific set of circumstances (Cooper, Gardner 1993). The nature and possibility of management in networks is really a long debate and if we use network of companies as complex adaptive systems, Ritter et al (2004) claim that networks are unmanageable, that's why cannot be controlled and directed by a single participant firm. "All firms are simultaneously involved in the ongoing management of the network, and the resulting structure and performance is co-produced by their actions" (Ritter, Wilkinson and Johnston 2004:177). So management of each firm should do their best to understand their interrelated roles and perspectives. The reason for this is that the integration and management of business processes across company boundaries will be successful only if it makes sense from each company's perspective (Cooper, Ellram, Gardner, and Hanks 1997). Nowadays it is critical to find a strategic supplier to business success, and its key metric is not only cost savings, but also increased shareholder value.

Existence of supply chains is not a new invention at all while high-level satisfaction of consumer needs or close and longer-term relationships among companies are well-known popular goals and methods in business sphere. The new tendency is the changes in business environment, which have strong effects and have resulted in creation of more and more supply chains (Gelei 2008).

Hungary has an inheritance of socialist system till 1989. Due to these different political and economic pre-conditions business relationships and networking show some special features but global tendencies have appeared as well. The tendency of growing number of newly established privately owned entrepreneurships has already started in the 1980's as a result of different – only – economic reforms. The party governance tolerated these firms however the legal framework was created a bit later in 1988 when already about 30000 private enterprises had been operating which were in many cases special "overtime brigades" working at weekends with the machines of state-owned factories earning as much as their monthly salaries. (Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv 1995:94) According to a Hungarian proverb much water has been flowed down in River Danube since that period but the new roots of Hungarian companies originate from these conditions.

That's why this paper introduces some findings of the latest relevant Hungarian studies and at the end we discuss our quantitative research on trust in supply chains. While data collection was finished only some weeks ago we chose the group the micro-sized firms and focus on them. But before Hungarian specialties we look through a few key topics concerning supply chain management in general:

2. Some Actual Questions about Supply Chain Management

From logistic perspective Bowersox (1978, 1986) makes a distinction between transaction and logistic channels. Furthermore Abrahamsson and Brege (1997) identify three flows such as materials, psychical distribution and purchasing.

We use now Chikán's (2004) definitions for supply chain: such value creating row of processes, which is necessary for establishment of certain product and service package and steps out the boundary of cooperating organizations in order to satisfy customer demands. The building stones of supply chains are the different kinds of organizations and their relationships. According to Håkansson and Snehota "A relationship is mutually oriented interaction between two reciprocally committed parties." (Håkansson and Snehota 1995:39) "A customer's supplier relationship will vary substantially in the level of activity links,

resource ties and interaction between the individuals. Some relationships are characterized by extensive interpersonal contacts, some by joint development of offerings. Some suppliers are kept at arm's length with minimal interaction. Some work solely to the customer's specification." (Ford – Gadde – Håkansson – Snehota 2006:101.) It means that, in general relationships usually include free choice and one or more common interests in short and/or long term. According to the Global Supply Chain Forum (GSCF) supply chain management is the integration of key business processes from end user through original suppliers that provides products, services, and information that add value for customers and other stakeholders (Cooper, Lambert and Pagh 1997).

The approach of supply chain management underlines that from theoretical aspect the boundaries of organizations are only artificial humps during processes of materials, information in the supply chain and the final goal is improvement of efficiency of the given supply chain. That's why it is vital to integrate and coordinate activities and processes both internal and among companies so as to pass through smoothly the borders of organizations. In order to achieve these aims decision makers should: 1) identify who should be a member of the marketing channel, 2) describe the need for channel coordination, and 3) draw actual marketing channels. Besides these tasks Lambert et al note that the importance of a total supply chain perspective is often neglected. Second, managers rather focus on marketing activities and flows across the channel and overlook the need to integrate and manage multiple key processes within and across companies (Lambert and Cooper, 2000). They also underline as a new finding that authors seem to assume that everyone knows who is a member of the supply chain.

The conceptual framework of supply chain in Cooper et al's view emphasizes the interrelated nature of SCM and the need to proceed through several steps to design and successfully manage a supply chain. Therefore they identify three groups which can describe supply chains: The supply chain network structure consists of the member firms and the links between these firms. Business processes are the activities that produce a specific output of value to the customer. Finally the management components are the managerial variables by which the business processes are integrated and managed across the supply chain (Cooper, Lambert and Pagh 1997).

With regard of integration among firms, market transactions increasingly involve novel forms of collaboration, particularly rich and carefully organized exchanges of information designed to identify and utilize possibilities for innovation (Gilson, Sabel and Scott 2009). Gilson et al found that the disintegration of vertical combinations in such sectors where earlier seemed irrevocably established and the exploration of collaborative alternatives to full integration, for example U.S. automobile makers, such as General Motors (Gilson, Sabel and Scott 2009) and in other branches of economy, concretely IBM, Ducati. The disintegration of production, moreover, is not limited to the manufacture of physical goods. But the new generations of products is also illustrated by the decreasing importance of the large, centralized research laboratory in industries, such as pharmaceuticals and telecommunications, where it was pioneered. Nowadays, research is likely to be conducted by an ad hoc consortium of firms of very different sizes. The disintegrated forms of uncertain environments are industrial districts (or "clusters") and systems engineering. This latter form also facilitates cooperation, but – in contrast to free-form combinations of clusters – it supports formalized cooperation among very large firms to produce complex products in very uncertain technological environments (Gilson, Sabel and Scott 2009).

Lambert and Cooper (2000) investigated the management components for successful SCM and found nine key-important elements such as:

1) Planning and control;

- 2) Work structure: this indicates how the firm performs its tasks and activities. The level of integration of processes across the supply chain is a measure of organizational structure. Lambert et al note that only one, of the literature sources that were examined cited work structure as an important component.
- 3) Organization structure, which refers to both the individual firm and the supply chain. The use of cross-functional teams would suggest more of a process approach.
- 4) The product flow facility structure: shows the network structure for sourcing, manufacturing, and distributing across the supply chain.
- 5) The information flow facility structure;
- 6) The management methods include the corporate philosophy and management techniques. For example it is very difficult to integrate a top-down organization structure with a bottom up structure.
- 7) Power and leadership structure: They found that in most chains studied, there are one or two strong leaders among the firms (Lambert and Cooper, 2000). The exercise of power, or the lack thereof, can affect the level of commitment of other channel members. But forced participation will encourage exit behavior, at a given opportunity (Macneil 1980).
- 8) The risk and reward structure;
- 9) At last culture and attitude. Aspects of culture include how employees are valued and how they are incorporated into the management of the firm.

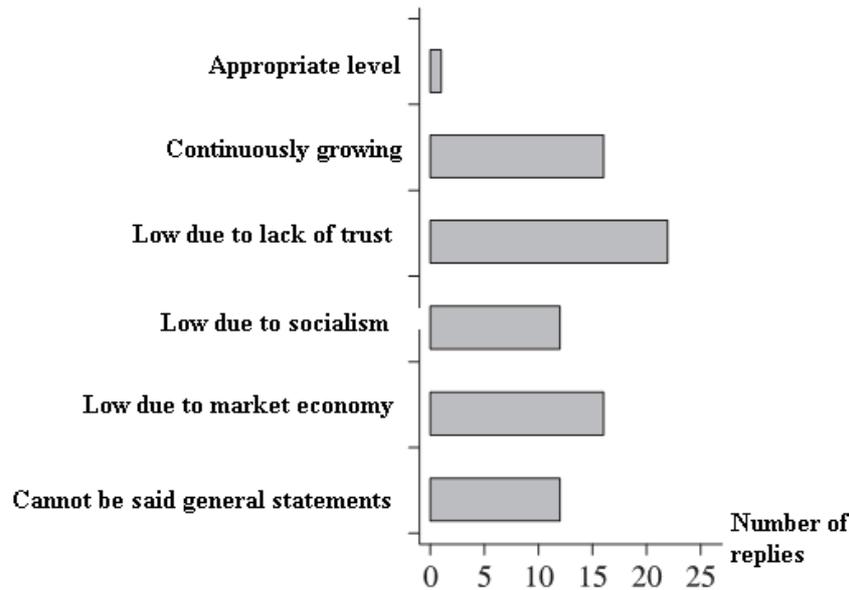
3. Special Features of Supply Chain Management in Hungary

Although in Hungary there were much more competitive markets of goods and services comparing with Romania and former East-Germany in the socialist system before 1989 due to different economic reforms, the competitive attitude among economic actors was not dominant. This means that such behavioural forms and skills have not developed as results of demand markets and shortage economy, which would have been essential in a real market economy. In the decades of socialism cooperative chains have operated based on family and friendship bonds but these worked among other kinds of conditions and the majority of these was liquidated or basically modified in the change of political economic system (Hámori – Szabó – Derecskei – Hurta – Tóth 2007).

So new business networking seems to be quite slow process in Hungary. Kolos et al (2006) investigated 301 companies in Hungary, which employ more than 50 persons and find that only 52 interviewed companies (17.6 %) indicated strategic alliances. These alliances determine their current horizontal and vertical integration and partly show their networking willingness as well. Besides strategic alliances the respondents prefer horizontal alliances and among activity fields marketing was the most frequent activity of horizontal cooperation. The majority of the interviewed firms have the opinion that strategic alliances have positive effect on their output and turnover furthermore 41 percents of the respondent plan to develop strategic cooperation within 3-5 years.

In a qualitative study Hámori et al (2007) investigated the competitive and cooperative behaviours of companies and find that 63 percents of respondents (50 persons) though that cooperative attitude is low among economic actors and in 22 cases (28 percents) identified lack of trust as result (see Figure 1). The second frequent reason was lack of cooperation. It is a paradox situation that 20 percents of respondents think market economy as cause of low cooperation willingness and 15 percents of interviewed Hungarian companies consider that the socialist regime is the blame for lack of cooperation.

Figure 1: Cooperation willingness among 65 interviewed Hungarian companies



Source: Hámori – Szabó – Derecskei – Hurta – Tóth 2007:587

Kolos et al (2006) also find that such characters of inter-personal relationships as sincerity, reliability and readiness to help have basic importance in evaluation of relationships. According to respondents relationship with a buyer is valuable if the buyer is: reliable (4.6 on the scale of one through five; 1: Insignificant and 5: Dominant importance), keeps his promises (4.32), contribute to the good reputation of his business partner (3.95), given information by him/her are relevant (3.91) or has good reputation (3.91). Therefore in the same study the supplier is valuable: if he keeps his promises (4.63), he is reliable (4.56), his contact persons are professionals (4.3), helps in solving problems (4.19), given information by him/her are relevant (4.15) and he is sincere (4.08).

4. Empirical Research about Trust in Supply Chain Management

4.1. The theoretical model

The starting point in our conceptual model of our research is that a successful supply chain relationship requires commitment among the supply chain partners, and trust is a critical element to sustain such commitment. So our main hypothesis is that lower behavioural uncertainty results higher the level of trust among supply chain partners.

Morgan and Hunt (1994) argue that competitive enterprises should secure competitive partners, and that trust and commitment to each other as most important factors in order to do so. Kwon and Suh (2004) addressed trust and commitment separately. Their research used the social exchange theory and the trade cost theory suggested by Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Joshi and Stump (1999) to investigate the factors influencing the degree of trust. In Kwon et al's study, communication to clarify uncertain behaviour is the biggest factor affecting the cost analysis. According to Coase (1994), the costs of coordination within a firm and the level of transaction costs that it faces are affected by its ability to purchase inputs from other firms, and their ability to supply these inputs depends in part on their costs of coordination and the level of transaction costs that they face. Vlachos and Bourlakis (2006) also showed that trust between the suppliers and retailers in the food industry in the United Kingdom contributed to the short term and long term relationships maintaining the distribution network. Skjoette-

Larsen, Thernoe and Andersen (2003) in Denmark found that there was still a high degree of resistance in exchanging information in building more intimate relationship.

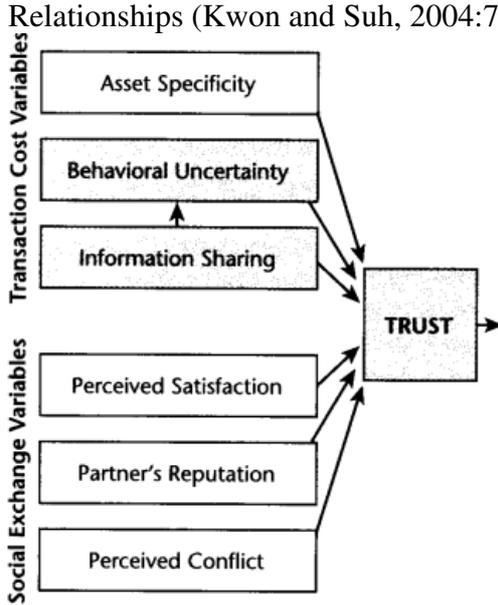
Connection between trust and commitment was proved in more cases, for example Fynes, Voss and Burca (2005) define the commitment relationship as efforts to continue relationships and to maintain the relationships in risk situations. Rese (2006) suggests that ideal control mechanism for value-creating network is necessary. In this system, every member of the whole distribution network can create their own value and the sustainable partnership can be improved.

Asset specificity is a theory of analyzing how cost of transaction in transaction cost theory can be reduced and refers to the cost paid for human and material resources provided to certain business partners (Kwon and Suh, 2004). Companies form governance that minimizes transaction cost. Investments in partners' specific assets are not easy to convert. This incurs potential costs and results problems that had to be prevented. Therefore companies' investment in partners' specific assets may cause distrust in partnerships because companies tend to minimize cost of transaction. In conversion of specific assets is desirably done, however, partnerships become satisfactory to build trust.

Information sharing is one of the most fundamental and critical factors for successful supply network management. Kumar and Dissel (1996) present integrated management of information system as an essential factor that promotes sustainable collaboration and manages conflicts within supply network. Sharing information is the first step in trust building. In vertical integration, information sharing tends to be one-sided. In this respect, information must be shared interactively in real-time for a sustainable partnership of trust.

If a partner's reputation and awareness is high in the market, the relationship with this partner is usually trustworthy. Building a reputation is not a short-run task. It takes time to build a reputation in the market; however, it is not an impossible task. Reputation is based on the perception of partners that other trading partners are honest, they deliver quality products/services, and they keep their word and never second-guess the other's intentions (Maister et al. 2000). Once trust could be developed, an organization can be satisfied with the partnership. In contrary direction it is also true that without trust, partnership will increase doubts and lost efforts to maintain partnership.

Figure 2: Factors Affecting the Level of Trust and Commitment in Supply Chain Relationships (Kwon and Suh, 2004:7)



The literature review suggests that there are many studies about sustainable cooperation and long-term partnership and factors for the successful relationship in terms of trust and commitment of the distribution network. This research is different from previous studies in that it focuses on the effects of trust on the sustainable distribution network management which goes beyond the long-term partnership and cooperation. Factors affecting trust in supply chain are summed up in Figure 2.

This research is part of an international investigation and the same, which mentioned in Kwon and Suh's paper (2004).

In this study, which took place in Hungary in the beginning of 2010, we focused on trust itself among very small companies so the influence of asset specificity, information sharing, partner's reputation, and perceived conflict on trust will be discussed in another paper. Now the following hypotheses were established to examine the relationship between trust and partnership, and the influence of partner's satisfaction on long-term partnership:

H1: Companies strive to develop longer term relationships.

H2: Firms think the personal side of business relationships counts.

H3: Firms trust their business partners.

4.2. Methodology

Those researchers who investigated trust, they usually started with the identification of the variables of operationalization, development of a set of items, establishing an adequate measurement scale, and then provides for the evaluation of reliability and validity (convergent and discriminate) of the scale that has been defined. The statistical procedures were used in order to purify the multi-item scale (battery of items) are usually exploratory factor analysis, item-to-total correlation and Cronbach alpha coefficient (Moorman, Zaltman and Despande 1992; Ganesan 1994; Mohr and Spekman 1994; Dahlstrom and Nygaard 1995; Doney and Cannon 1997; Nielson 1998).

In this study the trust factors are based on the results of Kumar et al. (1995). The variables used in the studies of Kwon and Suh (2004) and of Chu and Fang (2006) were considered to select the variables: asset specificity, information sharing, partner's reputation, and perceived conflicts. The questionnaires used the Likert's scale of one through seven.

The pilot research was fulfilled in Korea in 2006. The Korean economy has achieved an enormous growth and development and has experienced globalization and diversification with the emergence of Westernized corporate culture. The pilot study defined the variables that build trust for satisfying, long-term partnerships (asset specificity, information sharing, partner's reputation, and perceived conflicts).

The Korean research conducted a one-on-one interview with manufacturers and service providers. A total of 430 copies were distributed to 400 manufacturers and 30 other businesses and 75 copies (17.4%) were retrieved. Finally all variables were found to be very feasibility. All five factors that influence trust (partner's asset specificity, responder's asset specificity, information sharing, partner's reputation, and perceived conflict) are found to be strongly related to trust. Trust had a high correlation with all other variables, but had a relatively low correlation with partner's asset specification. In result of the correlation analysis, it was determined that all four factors that influence trust are equally significant.

4.3. Process of Research

As it was mentioned earlier this research is part of an international research and the first Hungarian results can be read below, the findings of international comparisons however will be published later.

First we translated the original questionnaire into Hungarian and controlled it in two steps. We asked fourteen tutors to read it through and write their opinions furthermore to

mark the questions they do not understand or the meaning of them is not clear enough. Having followed their suggestions we made four depth interviews with managers in Hungary when we looked through each question in details. We made some more small modifications and realized that although the majority of the interviewed leaders did not know the term of supply chain management, they could successfully apply it in their work. Therefore we put a small definition for it in our letter enclosed to the questionnaires. Afterwards we translated this latest Hungarian version into English and sent back to the project centre where it was found good that's why we started to organize questioning.

While questioning often hide tremendous mistakes and fails we tried to choose the most efficient but tiring method, the personal questioning. We asked correspondence students who usually work and have business relationships to help in questioning and we had ensured the necessary motivating and controlling system as well. Companies registered in Hungary were asked about trust in their supply chain independently on sizes and sectors of economy. The questioning process was closely monitored and we frequently discussed the experiences during it. This time the largest problem was that many interviewed firms did not want to give information about their annual sales revenue, which was necessary to identify the category of size of the given company.

Finally about 300 questionnaires were filled in properly in the beginning of 2010 and the evaluating is still lasting. In this paper we focus on the interviewed 157 micro-sized entrepreneurships (employees less than nine or maximum turnover two million Euro). Several publications have investigated small and medium-sized firms so far but quite few could catch and distinguish micro entrepreneurships.

4.4. Findings

Many of the above mentioned 157 Hungarian micro-sized firms are sole entrepreneurships. Among these companies, supply chain management has been (more or less) consciously applied for 4.3 years on an average (deviation: 4.77 years). This data shows their on own estimation and the explanation of the term also must have helped giving the right answer for this question. But we should take into considerations that in one hand this term is relatively new both in business life and academic publications and on the other hand for micro-sized firms it can be more difficult to see or understand their complex supply network because they represent smaller weight in it therefore they may get less information as well.

Before answering we asked the interviewed persons to think either on one of their buyers or one of their suppliers and relate each question to this chosen relationship. When we investigate our H1 (Companies strive to develop longer term relationships) we find that the average duration of their chosen relationship is 7.3 years (deviation: 4.3 years) which seems to be quite long period of time in business life. Furthermore the average answer for the question "We expect our relationship with the partner to continue for a long time" is also very high: 5.8 on the scale of one through seven. So we argue that our H1 was approved in case of micro firms.

Regarding to H2 (Firms think the personal side of business relationships counts) we refer to a qualitative research among SMEs in Hungary (Piricz, Mandják and Zolkiewski 2009) where almost all respondents agreed that "Personal contacts are the lifeblood of supplier-customer relationships" (Cunningham and Homse 1984:1). In this quantitative research among micro-sized entrepreneurships the number of the annual "man-days" that the interviewed firm and the partner firm spent in face-to-face contact during the previous year was 28.1 days on an average (deviation: 47.3 days), which is not high comparing with the annual working days and the deviation also proves that personal contacts did not seem to be essential however the main purpose of this study was not the personal aspects of business relationships but trust in supply chain. Due to low value of "man-days" among the smallest

firms we state that in this study among micro firms H2 was not approved. This can mean that entrepreneurs rather apply other communicating forms than personal contacts.

In case of H3 (Firms trust their business partners) now we investigated the questions that focus directly on trust and we deal with the variables such as asset specificity, information sharing, partner's reputation, and perceived conflicts later in another paper. Three questions relate the most directly on trust and their average values (4.6, 5.6, 4.7 on the scale of one through seven; 1: Strongly Disagree and 7: Strongly Agree) indicate that micro-sized entrepreneurs consider trust as an essential factor in their relationships in their supply chains so H3 was approved.

We must note again that these findings are only the first results and relate to a specific group of respondents (micro firms).

5. Conclusions

Due to globalization and information technology growth, the business environment has become complicated but the concept of trust is present in various relationships. A number of previous researches address the relationship between trust and commitment as factors to increase the outcome of cooperation and partnership between companies. They show that trust facilitates commitment.

In case of Hungary both managers and academic researchers should identify and distinguish at the same what are the special Hungarian (sometimes simply Central European) characters of supply chain management and what global changes and developments have appeared here too. Our latest research underline again that companies including micro-sized ones would like to develop and maintain long-term relationships maybe as an opposite pole of very uncertain micro,- and macro-environment. Although personal contacts relevant in everyday business life it is understandable that nowadays managers choose more time and cost consuming forms of contact and communication than personal meeting.

But trust seems to be essential between both Hungarian and Korean entrepreneurs as it was obviously mirrored in their answers independently on sectors of economy. Hopefully the theoretical model will be developed further or refined after the evaluation process and we will know more about possible different attitudes, practices of trust by creating categories of size, activity and supply chain management.

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