The Effect of Dynamic Relationship Capabilities on B2B Lolyalty

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SUMMARY

The focal issue of our study is to model the adaptation capability of enterprises from a relational point of view in the South Great Plain Region of Hungary. Our main question is how enterprises can modify their relational behaviour in B2B markets to ensure the success of their relationships. We use the resource based view from a dynamic aspect. To operationalise the investigation problem we use the dynamic relational capability framework. In the study we investigate the perceived values of dynamic relational capability and the effect of relational capability on the perceived relationship success.

Keywords: dynamic relational capability, relationship success, B2B loyalty

Journal of Economic Literature (JEL) codes: M15IT, M31

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INTRODUCTION

The management of inter-organisational collaboration is still a key issue even in today's networked economy. This is particularly the case when the success of an organisation not only depends on its internal efficiency and productivity, but rather on the success of those network(s) within which the organisation operates. This study is aimed at finding out how the embedded patterns of reconfiguration in relationship behaviour influence the success of collaboration between organisations. The success of relationships can be illustrated on several dimensions. In the different models, these dimensions appear in various correlations, but there are only a few models where the role of dynamic relationship capabilities are examined in the view of the quality of the relationship and there are even fewer theoretical approaches that examine the coherence between dynamic relationship capabilities and inter-organisational loyalty. In the approach of this study, dynamic relationship capability refers to a process during which organisations are able and willing to demonstrate permanent flexible behaviour and reconfigure their actions and behaviour in order to meet the expectations of their partners. Reconfiguration propensity that appears on the various levels of dynamic relationship capabilities also represents a continued development of relationship capabilities.

DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP CAPABILITIES

The phenomenon of relationship capability, or network capability (as it is termed) is inherently linked to the concept of dynamic capabilities. Relationship capabilities can be understood as all those routines, processes and patterns of action that allow an organisation to formulate its relationship with external partners, optimise its relationship portfolio and allocate its resources among its partner relationships (Gemünden et al. 1997; Ritter 1999; Ritter et al. 2002; Mitrega et al. 2012). Äyväri & Möller (2008) have comprehensively studied the concepts related to relationship capabilities (categorising them as networking capabilities) and described these capabilities as multi-dimensional phenomena. The authors identified three very specific levels of relationship capabilities: the organisational aspect, the relationship aspect and the network aspect.

For the research carried out in this study, a vantage point from the organisational level has been chosen. This study focuses on how organisations, in order to enhance the success of their collaboration, are able to reconfigure all of the routines, processes and patterns of action that are available for them to manage and execute their collaborative activities.

The capability to reconfigure the management of collaboration has been approached in the literature from several levels and in various ways. A study conducted by Roseiraet al. (2013) reflects on the features of dynamic

relationship capabilities that are to be found on a strategic level. By taking a dominantly Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group (IMP) interaction approach into consideration, their study emphasises the integration of relationship strategy, interactions, network pictures and organisational positioning. The authors highlight that any reconfigurations that may take place in the relationship strategy initiated by an organisation are determined just as much by the organisation's ability to reconfigure its network picture (sensation and comprehension of network characteristics) as by any reconfiguration that may take place in the given situation. Reinhartz et al. (2004) studied relationship management reconfiguration capability from a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) process perspective. The authors concluded that in connection with the composition and modification of relationship processes, there are three distinctive characteristics to think about. Firstly, there are organisational and industry-specific characteristics and the ability to manage the reconfiguration of these given characteristics. Secondly, in line with relationship process modifications, the authors highlight the importance of relationship life-cycle evaluation. Finally, the authors underline the management of the diverse distribution of relationship value, which is heterogeneous between the partners over time. A longitudinal approach to dynamic relationship capabilities is linked to the processes, the particular relationship management methods and the interpersonal level of collaboration. The longitudinal assessment of dynamic relationship capabilities highlight all those capabilities that are vital when collaborations are launched, expanded and closed (Mitrega et al. 2012; Havila & Medlin 2012; Ritter and Geersbro 2010, 2011). Studies conducted in this field illustrate that a number of factors considerably influence how successful collaboration management is achieved, such as the assessment of partners, the launch of collaboration processes, information sharing, communication, the management of mutual decision-making, the sharing of risks and benefits, knowledge sharing, the management of interpersonal relationships, the management of differences in relationships, the recognition of unwanted partners, the existence of routines that guide the closure of relationships, and the motivation levels of individuals to initiate reconfiguration activities related to how they associate with their partners.

For the study of dynamic relationship capabilities, it is worth reviewing the conclusions of Johnsen and Ford (2006). The authors claim that the level of reconfiguration capabilities that an organisation may achieve is determined by the following factors combined: personal interactions, technological change, organisational structure/process and cultural dynamism. These factors are closely intertwined.

THE CUCCESS OF COLLABORATIONS

The judgement whether a relationship is successful or not depends on several factors. Should the partners decide that a relationship has positive benefits, the partners usually make efforts to engage in a long-term collaboration (Costabile 2000; Järvelin 2001; Rauyruen & Miller 2007; Kong 2008; Čater & Čater 2010).

To bring to light the most important factors found in inter-organisational relationships, studies dominantly focus on factors such as the perceived quality of products or services, satisfaction, trust, commitment (Morgan & Hunt 1994; Ganesan 1994) and fairness (Kahneman et al. 1986; Jambulingham et al. 2011), but few studies examine whether there is loyalty on the B2B markets, and if there is, what the nature of loyalty is in that particular business context (Costabile 2000; Hennig-Thurau 2002; Rauyruen & Miller 2007; Čater & Čater 2010; Haghkhah et al. 2013). At the same time, this is an important issue, as numerous studies have shown that the mutual loyalty that businesses express towards each other may also be an appropriate measuring tool for the success of collaborations (Hetesi 2007).

In the literature, inter-organisational loyalty appears in three categories: behavioural, attitudinal and complex loyalty. Behavioural loyalty is defined as the partner's intention to repurchase and perform cross-buying (Dick & Basu 1994; Hennig & Thurau 2004), i.e., behavioural loyalty is seen as an intention: the willingness of a partner to renew existing contracts and sign new ones. Attitudinal loyalty is a higher level of loyalty: the partner is also emotionally and psychologically engaged, trusts the relationship and is committed to an organisation (Garbarino & Johnson 1999; Fullerton 2005). The complex form of loyalty is a combination of behavioural and attitudinal loyalty where re-purchasing and cross-buying activities are tied to an emotional attachment (Oliver 1999; Costabile 2000; Rauyruen & Miller 2007).

A MODEL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS– A RESEARCH-BASED APPROACH

As a starting point in the research of the impact of dynamic relationship capabilities on relationship success, this study has taken a multidimensional approach of dynamic relationship capabilities. The preliminary model framework for the investigation, is adopted from the research results of Sanches (2004), who employed the theory of organisations as open systems to distinguish between five different levels of dynamic capabilities. The second field to review at the beginning of this study was the universal process-based approach of Pavlou & El Sawy (2011). The authors, in order to put organisational

dynamics into practice in specific areas, identified a framework of the following four capability components: sensing capabilities – the ability to spot and interpret change; learning capabilities – the ability to add new knowledge to existing information, distribute new information and be aware of how new information is to be applied; integrating capabilities – the ability to integrate new information into existing operations and combine the new knowledge with already existing intelligence; and finally coordination capabilities – the ability to manage the allocation of resources and the division of labour following a reconfigured operational model, i.e. the organisation is made capable of assimilating a reconfigured pattern as a permanent component of its operations.

The conclusions of the model development process are summarised as follows. Dynamic relationship capabilities are best approached from three directions. As illustrated in Table 1, dynamic relationship capabilities have strategic, process and coordination dimensions. The strategic flexibility level of dynamic relationship capabilities describes the extent to which an organisation is able to consider alternative relationship strategies and implement the strategic changes into its existing relationship system (Ravald & Grönroos 1996; Anderson & Narus 1999; Storbacka 1997; Ford et al. 1998; Walter et al. 2001; Möller & Törrönen 2003; Ulaga 2003; Johnsen & Ford 2006; Möller 2006; Roseira et al. 2013).

Table 1
A model for the evaluation of dynamic relationship performance

	Strategic flexibility level of dynamic relationship capabilities	**Process flexibility level of dynamic relationship capabilities**	**Coordination flexibility level of dynamic relationship capabilities**
Sensing Capability	Sensation of relationship interactions	Longitudinal sensation of relationship portfolio	Sensation capability of the demands of partners and related units
Evaluation Capability	Evaluation of relationship investments and relationship value	Evaluation of relationship life cycle	Capability of evaluating the satisfaction level of partners inside and outside the organisation
Learning Capability	Capability of reconfiguring network picture and perceived position	Capability of developing new processes to launch, expand and terminate relationships	Capability of learning best practices from inside and outside the organisation
Integrating Capability	Capability of reconfiguring strategy	Capability of adapting workflow management solutions; capability of reconfiguring processes related directly to relationship management	Capability of reconfiguring relationship management tasks

Source: devised by the authors

The process flexibility level of dynamic relationship capabilities encompasses the capability of a long-term perception and evaluation of the relationship life-cycle i.e. the perception of a need to launch, expand or terminate collaboration activities, and in support of the latter, this level also includes the capability to foster new processes and reconfigure existing relationship processes (Dwyer et al. 1987; Ritter & Geersbro 2010, 2011; Havila & Medlin 2012; Mitrega et al. 2012). The coordination level of dynamic relationship capabilities encompasses the capability to understand the intentions of those partners who show interest in relationship management and the capability to employ methods that bring about those reconfigurations that help meet the expectations of the partners (Håkansson & Snehota 1995; Ford et al. 1998; Menon et al. 2005; Ivens & Pardo 2007; Schurr et al. 2008).

Next in this research, based on the previous studies conducted by Roseira et al. (2013), Mitrega et al. (2012) and Havila & Medlin (2012), it has been assumed that a complex approach to the levels of dynamic relationship capabilities exerts a beneficial influence on the perception of successful collaborations. Taking both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty into consideration, the perception of successful collaborations has been

embraced through the complex idea of inter-organisational loyalty.

Table 2
Researched characteristics of complex loyalty

	Definition
Loyalty (attitudinal)	The partner has emotional and psychological affection, has trust in the relationship and is committed to the organisation.
Loyalty (behavioural)	The partner has an intention to repurchase and engage in cross-buying.

Source: devised by the authors

STUDY METHODOLOGY

As a first step for the operationalisation procedure of the research question, this study used the model for dynamic relationship capabilities illustrated in Table 1. The enquiry has been aimed at finding out whether on each level of dynamic relationship capabilities it is possible to embrace specific descriptive factors and whether these factors influence the perceived success of inter-organisational collaborations, in this case: loyalty. In order to investigate these topics, a quantitative questionnaire survey was carried out between 1 July 2014 and 31 August 2014 with the participation of Southern Great Plain businesses in Hungary that have at least two employees. Respondents were to mark their experience using a 6 point Likert scale.

From the above-mentioned questionnaire data, with the assistance of the Hungarian Central Statistics Office (HCSO), the authors have taken a representative random sample of the target group. The distribution of the questionnaires was done electronically, again with the involvement of the workforce at the HCSO. The participants had two weeks to complete the questionnaires; the financial decision makers of the business were requested to fill in the electronic document. A total of 605 businesses returned the questionnaire, which is equal to a 10% response rate.

During the analysis of the responses, the measurement reliability of both the individual levels of dynamic relationship capabilities and the relationship success was tested with calculations based on Cronbach's alpha value with an acceptable value set at 0.6. Exploratory factor analysis was used to study the levels of dynamic relationship capabilities and the behaviour of inter-organisational loyalty. The analysis aimed to reveal whether the variables that are measured at each capability level and for each loyalty dimensions indeed describe the same fact. During the analysis, a 60% information maintenance level has been considered as the minimally acceptable level, i.e. the outcome of the investigation has only been accepted if the variables derived from the calculations of the factor analysis maintained at least 60% of the information content of the original variables. Finally, due to the confirmatory nature of the study, Partial Least Squares (PLS) path analysis method has been made use of to test the impact of dynamic relationship capability levels on perceived relationship success (Kazár 2014).

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

During the course of the current study, the reconfiguration capabilities affecting the relationship systems at the organisations have been evaluated from three perspectives – in line with the research model presented in Table 1 – and inter-organisational complex loyalty has been evaluated from two perspectives – in line with Table 2.

As a first step in the analysis, the reliability of the applied measurement model was tested. The test was performed with the Cronbach's alpha calculation technique: the Cronbach's alpha value was 0.874 for the questions linked to the strategic flexibility level of dynamic relationship capabilities, 0.892 for the questions linked to the process flexibility level and 0.891 for the questions linked to coordination flexibility . Each of these values corresponded with the acceptance limit that had been set in the conditions framework. The test of measurement reliability was concluded with the appraisal of complex loyalty. The Cronbach's alpha value of the questions linked to complex loyalty was 0.665, which also corresponded with the acceptance limit set in the conditions framework.

In the next phase of the model evaluation procedure, exploratory factor analysis was used to determine whether the defined variables can indeed be described by the previously presupposed factors.

The examination of dynamic relationship capabilities began by identifying the factor for strategic flexibility. As a first step, it was tested whether the sensation of relationship interactions, the evaluation of relationship investments and relationship value, the capability of reconfiguring the network picture and the perceived position and the capability of reconfiguring strategy to a relationship-based model can be described by one single factor (a primary component). The performed factor analysis yielded the following result: by maintaining 73% of the information content of the original variables, the above-mentioned variables are described by one factor (KMO: 0.804; Bartlett test Sig: 0.000).

Table 3

Maintained information content during the evaluation of the factor describing the strategic flexibility of collaborations

Maintained information content						
Component	Eigenvalues			Sum of the squares of loading variables		
	Total	Variance percentage	Cumulative percentage	Total	Variance percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	2.905	72.632	72.632	2.905	72.632	72.632
2	0.538	13.448	86.080			
3	0.362	9.054	95.134			
4	0.195	4.866	100.000			

Source: devised by the authors

Table 4

Results derived from the exploratory factor analysis performed on components emerging during evaluation of the strategic flexibility of collaborations

Co-movement of components describing the strategic flexibility of collaborations	
	Component
	Strategic flexibility of collaborations
Evaluation of relationship investments and relationship value	0.915
Capability of changing network picture and perceived position	0.883
Perception of relationship interactions	0.849
Reconfiguring strategy to fit a relationship-based model	0.754

Source: devised by the authors

The exploration of dynamic relationship capabilities continued with the analysis of the process flexibility factor. It was tested whether the variables linked to the longitudinal sensation of relationship portfolio, the evaluation of relationship life cycle, the capability of developing new processes to launch, expand and terminate relationships and the capability of adapting workflow management solutions with the capability of reconfiguring processes related directly to relationship management can be described by one single factor (a primary component). The factor analysis yielded the following result: by maintaining 70% of the information content of the original variables, one factor describes the above-mentioned variables (KMO: 0.804; Bartlett test Sig: 0.000).

Table 5

Maintained information content during the evaluation of the factor describing the process flexibility of collaborations

Maintained information						
Component	Eigenvalues			Sum of the squares of loading variables		
	Total	Variance percentage	Cumulative percentage	Total	Variance percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	3.513	70.262	70.262	3.513	70.262	70.262
2	0.627	12.548	82.811			
3	0.389	7.776	90.587			
4	0.260	5.210	95.797			
5	0.210	4.203	100.000			

Source: devised by the authors

Table 6

Results derived from the exploratory factor analysis performed on the components that emerged during the evaluation of the process flexibility of collaborations

Co-movement of components describing the process flexibility of collaborations	
	Component
	Process flexibility of collaborations
Evaluation of relationship life cycle	0.878
Capability of adapting workflow management solutions	0.870
Capability of developing new processes to launch, expand and terminate relationships	0.853
Capability of reconfiguring processes related directly to relationship management	0.843
Longitudinal sensation of relationship portfolio	0.739

Source: devised by the authors

The exploration of the levels of dynamic relationship capabilities ended with the test of coordination flexibility. It was examined whether the sensation capability of the demands of partners and related units, capability of evaluating the satisfaction level of partners inside and outside the organisation, capability of learning best practices from inside and outside the organisation, capability of reconfiguring relationship management tasks and the capability to involve an intermediary can be described by one single factor. The factor analysis yielded the following result: by maintaining 76% of the information content of the original variables, one factor describes the above-mentioned variables in this case as well (KMO: 0.804; Bartlett test Sig: 0.000).

Table 7

Maintained information content during the evaluation of the factor describing the coordination flexibility of collaborations

Preserved information content						
Component	**Eigenvalues**			**Sum of the squares of loading variables**		
	Total	**Variance percentage**	**Cumulative percentage**	**Total**	**Variance percentage**	**Cumulative percentage**
1	3.024	75.595	75.595	3.024	75.595	75.595
2	0.544	13.588	89.183			
3	0.287	7.185	96.368			
4	0.145	3.632	100.000			

Source: devised by the authors

Table 8

Results derived from the exploratory factor analysis performed on the components that emerged during the evaluation of the coordination flexibility of collaborations

Co-movement of components describing the strategic flexibility of collaborations	
	Component
	Coordination flexibility of collaborations
Capability of evaluating the satisfaction level of partners inside and outside the organisation	0.902
Sensation capability of the demands of partners and related units	0.886
Capability of reconfiguring relationship management tasks and the capability to involve an intermediary	0.851
Capability of learning best practices from inside and outside the organisation	0.838

Source: devised by the authors

Following the evaluation of dynamic relationship capability factors, components of complex loyalty that operationalise successful collaborations were identified. As a starting point, it was examined whether the values that are looked at during the evaluation of complex loyalty as a target variable may be described by one constructed variable (factor). However, as illustrated in Table 9, it is evident that in this case the complex loyalty factor would only maintain 51% of the information content of the originally examined variables, which is below the values set in the conditions framework.

In line with a statistically correct way of maintaining information, there are two factors for the description of complex loyalty (attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty factors, as illustrated in Table 10). These factors offer 73% information maintenance (KMO: 0.663; Bartlett body Sig: 0,000).

Table 9
Maintained information content during the evaluation of the factor describing the loyalty of collaborations

Maintained information content						
Component	**Eigenvalues**			**Sum of the squares of loading variables**		
	Total	**Variance percentage**	**Cumulative percentage**	**Total**	**Variance percentage**	**Cumulative percentage**
1	2.041	51.017	51.017	2.041	51.017	51.017
2	0.865	21.614	72.632			
3	0.661	16.524	89.155			
4	0.434	10.845	100.000			

Source: devised by the authors

Table 10
Results derived from the exploratory factor analysis performed on the components that emerged during the evaluation of the strategic flexibility of collaborations

Co-movement of components describing the strategic flexibility of collaborations		
	Component	
	Loyalty (behavioural)	**Loyalty (attitudinal)**
In the future, we are planning to purchase from some other product/service categories of our partners.	0.919	
We are willing to continue to purchase repeatedly from the products of our partners.	0.772	
We usually recommend our partners to other parties		0.797
Although other partners of ours may offer slightly more favourable price conditions, we stay with our partners.		0.796

Source: devised by the authors

These results call the readers' attention to the fact that behavioural, attitudinal and complex descriptions of loyalty should be reinterpreted in the field of B2B relationships. In the final phase of data evaluation, the correlation between the modelled factors of dynamic relationship capabilities and the factors of behavioural and attitudinal loyalty was determined. For this process, the PLS path analysis method has been used, the results of which are summarised in Figure 1. From these results two profound correlations become clear:

- Firstly, there is a correlation between the examined levels of dynamic relationship capabilities: the degree of coordination flexibility determines the degree of process flexibility by up to 44% and process flexibility explains the level of strategic flexibility by up to 61%;
- Secondly, the degree of dynamic relationship capabilities influences the level of organisational loyalty, and with that, the success of collaborations. Each level of dynamic relationship capabilities defines behavioural loyalty by 11.6% and attitudinal loyalty by 15.7%. It is to be noted that while coordination, process and strategic flexibility affect behavioural loyalty to a more or less similar degree, there is no such balance in the case of attitudinal loyalty. In the latter case, the strongest effect was exerted by coordination flexibility, while strategic flexibility bears no effect on attitudinal loyalty.

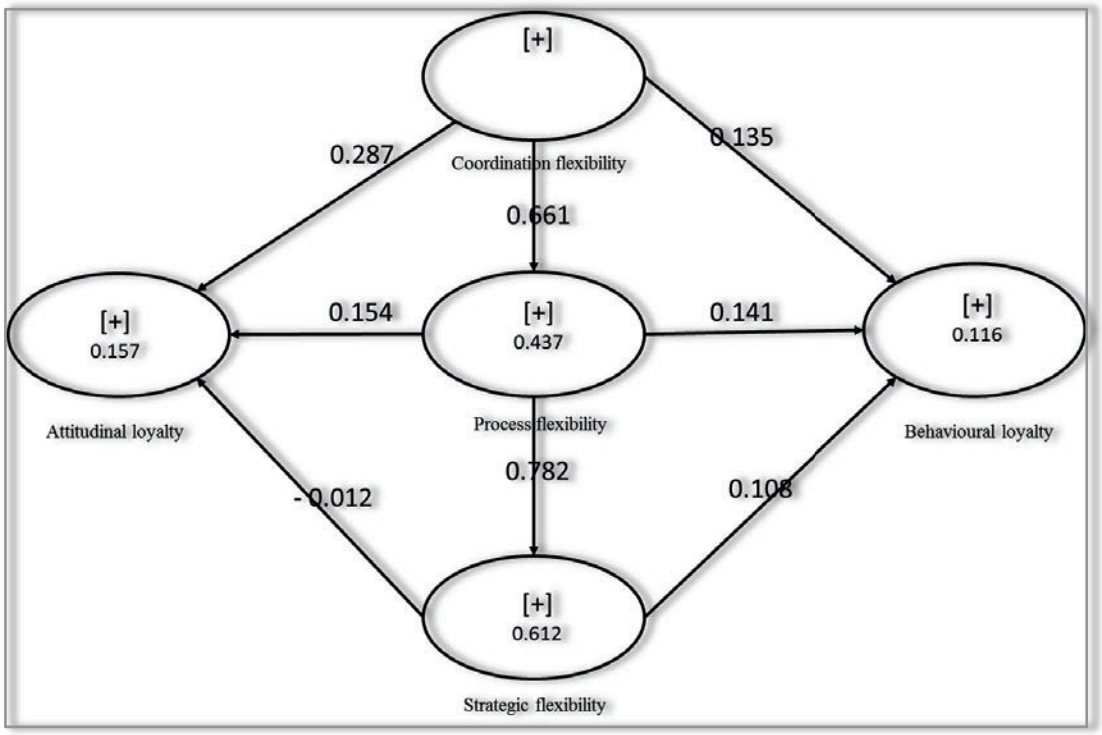

Figure 1 The relationship between dynamic relationship capabilities and relationship success
Source: devised by the authors

SUMMARY

The research presented in this study has realized two goals: firstly, it has made an attempt to measure the complex phenomenon of dynamic relationship capabilities; secondly, it has examined the relationship between dynamic relationship capabilities and collaboration success. The results indicate that dynamic relationship capabilities can be described along the applied three levels (strategic, coordination and process flexibility of collaborations) and that the set of tools that organisations develop in line with these three levels also influences the degree of flexibility that may be achieved at a one-stage-higher level. The indicated results also demonstrate the fact that dynamic relationship capabilities influence loyalty perceived during collaborations, which is regarded as a distinctive property of all successful collaborations.

On the other hand, the results of the research raise a number of questions as well. It is yet unclear how dynamic relationship capabilities become influential to relationship loyalty.

Further research questions may be the following:

- How do dynamic relationship capabilities affect the static relationship capabilities of organisations?
- What impact do dynamic relationship capabilities have on the performance of collaborations?
- How do dynamic relationship capabilities influence two very important loyalty- defining characteristics: trust and commitment?

Although the research results raise many questions, they point out the phenomenon of dynamic relationship capabilities as a phenomenon that can be embraced by organisational management and, with the assistance of which it is possible to manage the dynamics of inter-organisational interaction and the development of a set of responses for businesses.

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