Innovation Cooperation: Buyer-Supplier Relations

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SUMMARY

The business marketing literature of the past few years has mostly examined business relationships on a value basis. In addition to the strategic importance of relationships with customers, cooperation with suppliers is also a priority. Relationships have shifted from aggressive, competitive, superficial relationships with many suppliers to long-term partnerships with fewer suppliers. Using two-step research – a case study and questionnaire survey conducted in Hungary – this paper examines how the extent of the buyer's contribution affect the success of the innovation market and how this depends on the supplier's innovation value.

Keywords: innovation, cooperation, supplier-buyer relationship, innovation value of supplier
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INTRODUCTION

One of the most common issues of today's business practice is the existence and operation of business relationships and networks and their impact on economic activity and competitiveness. Starting from the mid-1970s, marketers started to deal more deeply with the ' market operation of organizations. The results of primarily European empirical research have led to the recognition that procurement behaviour, supply chain management and buyer and supplier relationships are to be interpreted as a complex process and must be considered together with the interactions between the parties. These findings led to the establishment of the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) Group. The IMP Group is an informal, international network of hundreds of scholars who approach marketing, purchasing, innovation, technological development and management from an interactive perspective, in a B2B and a B2C context. Their work includes research on public-private networks, policy, and science-technology-business issues. With its extensive international research, the group has formed one of the most decisive theories of business relationships and networks.

As a distinctive feature of business marketing, it is considered that the marketing field is the most representative of "theory-driven practice management" and "problem-driven theory management". Looking at the research trends, besides sales management, purchasing behaviour, new product development, marketing strategy management and distribution concepts, buyer-supplier relations were the focus of interest (LaPlaca & Katrichi, 2009).

Business practice has drawn attention to the need for a deeper understanding of business relationships for the sake of development. Deeper understanding and mapping of dyadic business relationships, placing them in a network context – especially those where cooperation and value creation take place – has been in the focus point.

The relationship based marketing approach has two basic directions, market-based and network-based (Möller & Halinen 2000). The market as a networking approach is becoming more and more developed today, and one of the effects of this trend is the growing openness of innovation processes. According to Backhaus et al. (2013), relationship-based marketing approaches and innovation are evaluated and are becoming a key to success.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A co-creation concept or philosophy can provide a sort of solution to a company's ever-increasing efficiency and compliance competition. The company must step out of a company-centred way of thinking and find where common value creation and common innovation levels can be achieved. Emphasis should be placed on personal relationships, focusing on common thinking, sharing value, experience and experience for the buyer and

stakeholders to seek this kind of cooperation. It is important to assess the impact of relationships and to clarify roles and tasks (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

The business marketing literature of the past few years has examined business relationships mostly on a value basis, highlighting the factors and characteristics of relationship marketing. On this basis, the key question of long-term survival and success of companies is the creation of a premium customer value (Anderson & Narus 2004). Not only is the strategic significance of relationships with customers emphasized in the literature, but also the relationships with suppliers. The nature of the relationships has shifted from very aggressive, competitive and superficial relationships with many suppliers to long-term partnerships with fewer suppliers. The supplier's choice and determination of the supplier's value have become a question of competitiveness.

Over the past decades, an increasing number of theories and practices have examined the impact of collaborative supplier relationships and the sources of competitive advantage. Thus, the 1980s marketing literature concluded that these relationships should be considered as a strategic issue. Relations with suppliers and buyer-supplier relationships are important for a company. The importance of relations with suppliers was observed in the 1980s, beginning with the success of Japanese car and electronics companies. It was thought that one of the keys to success was the close relationship with the suppliers (Liker et al. 1996).

Of course, since the importance of the supplier relations strategy has been established, many studies have looked at the benefits and effectiveness of relationships. At the same time, practice began to change its basic attitude to supplier relationships, and through the strategy of hostile relationship management, we reached towards thought-built, long-term relationship with key suppliers, employing a large number of suppliers (Narayandas & Rangan 2004).

Most studies agree that tactile, nominal involvement of suppliers does not guarantee a real improvement in innovation performance (Liker et al. 1996; Freytag et al. 2012). A poorly selected supplier (with inadequate capabilities) can lead to lower innovation performance or even business failure (Zsidis & Smith 2005). Buying companies can increase their innovation performance by working with the most innovative suppliers. Of course, these vendors cannot provide all of their customers with the same resources (Gulati et al. 2000). Thus, if competing companies rely on the innovativeness of the same supplier, it will be very difficult to gain a competitive advantage through the common supplier chain (Dyer & Hatch, 2006). Without reciprocal linkage and commitment between the supplier and the buyer, companies may lose the innovation contribution from suppliers and thus the competitive advantage (Takeishi, 2001). In order to get innovation value from the supplier network, buyer companies need to know which vendors they need to work with, what kind of vendor skills they need to pay attention to, what kind of relationship they need to develop and what marketing skills a buyer needs.

The change in customer-supplier relationships poses challenges for both parties. The buyer should be able to distinguish between qualified suppliers and be able to determine the best supplier base possible. To do this, the supplier has to adapt and has to find the customer base where can become a key supplier and work together.

The most common reason for collaborations is the broader experience and knowledge that can be gained (Romijn & Albaladejo 2002). So the innovation capacity of suppliers is a key asset for companies (Möller & Törrönen 2003; Azadegan & Dooley 2010). Many potential innovation partners can be distinguished and several types of innovation results can come from these relationships. Von Hippel (1988) was one of the first to find that customers and suppliers are the primary source of innovative product ideas. Not only is maximizing operational performance important, companies are seeking innovation potential to create value for their customers through this capability (Kibbeling 2010). Chesbrough (2003) also emphasized in his open innovation theory that the growing power of transport companies , their influence also contributed significantly to the spread of open innovation.

The assessment of value co-creation, the relationship value of the supplier is the basis for other research. Most research basically investigates the impact of relationships on innovation outcome with in-depth interviews and case studies (Nambisan and Baron 2009; Bowonder et al. 2010). At first, the model of the value of relationships was based on reflective measurement models (Lapierre, 2000). In later research the formative measurement model was increasingly applied (Ulaga & Eggert 2006; Schiele et al. 2012; Yan et al. 2017).

Based on international and Hungarian literature, the research studies examine the impact of the supplier's technological and networking properties on the tightness of innovation co-operation. The main objective of the research is to identify a supplier innovation value that helps the customer to identify the most appropriate suppliers and key suppliers, focusing on the differentiating effect of resource-based and network-based innovation value.

On the basis of a summary and synthesis of literature a theoretical framework has been formulated by me that is the basis of my qualitative research. The framework is based on Möller's (2003) theory of innovation and technology, which explains that network properties are as important as technological properties. In formulating the involvement of suppliers in the buyer innovation process, the theoretical model of Schiele et al. (2012) was the basis. The more robust appearance of network attributes and network thinking was provided by Yan et al. (2017).

However, companies have other resources outside the organization, in the form of partnerships and associations (Lavie 2006). Integration and collaboration with external partners can benefit companies in the innovation process.

(Gemünden et al. 1996) The company is embedded in a network of potential partners and its innovation process, so innovation must be interpreted from a network perspective (Gemünden et al. 1996). Examining corporate competencies, innovation is also greatly enhanced by technological excellence in networking (Ritter & Gemünden 2003; Piskóti 2016a). Thus, it is important to examine the impact of cooperation with different stakeholders on innovation and types of innovation.

According to the resource-based approach, the basis for company differentiation is the company's unique resource base, which cannot be imitated by competitors (Barney, 1991). In fact, the innovation value of suppliers is based on their own internal corporate resources (Sjoerdsma and van Weele, 2015). In the resource-based approach, the buyer company is looking for suppliers that are similar, technologically advanced, and able to establish a strong relationship with the buyer when searching for innovation partners.

According to the network-based approach, the value of innovation can be created by the supplier's value-added network, which is made up of the supplier's chain and innovation partners. According to the theory, the supplier's network is an innovation resource for the buyer company. It is important to emphasize that the network-based innovation value approach builds on and goes beyond the resource-based approach. Beyond corporate capabilities and dyadic relationships, the customer company and the supplier company are also embedding networks into networks. Some approaches suggest that testing should be placed at the level of the "dual-ego network" and focus on how the value network of the buyer company crosses the value network of the supplier company (Yan et al. 2017).

Based on literature, the research examines the impact of supplier involvement on the tightness of innovation cooperation. The main objective of the research is to determine the value of an innovation supplier, which helps the buyer to identify the most optimal suppliers, key suppliers, and to prioritize the differentiating effect of resource-based and network-based innovation value.

My research is based on the findings that collaborations are playing an increasingly important role in innovation development (Yan et al. 2017), and that cooperation and joint development with customers and suppliers are common among innovation partners. Innovation cooperation with the supplier, its content and impact on the market success of innovation are highlighted.

The supplier's innovation value was first formulated by Barney (1991), according to which the supplier's potential contribution to customer innovation is by sharing and making available its resources. In our case In this study, the supplier's innovation value - reconsidering the previous definition - I adopt a different formulation of the supplier's innovation value: innovation value becomes a real, realized value because the potential supplier value - which consists of the supplier's own resources and supplier network capabilities - meets the customer's innovation demand, creating a real supplier innovation value.

The success of innovations is determined by the strategic combination of business and process and product factors. Innovation is no longer simply an internal, secret matter for businesses, but a multi-faceted, multi-actor collaboration. The success of innovation is increasingly determined by how a business can manage its relationships and collaborations in this process. Market success can be measured using indicators; Piskóti (2016a, 2016b) proposes ten indicators for this purpose: market share, revenue, profit amount, share, reputation, number of customers, satisfaction, loyalty, brand equity and license fees).

The supplier's innovation value is unique, and each supplier has a different innovation value for the buyer, just as a supplier can have different innovation value for different customers. In the course of the study, I was interested in the factors that are most important in selecting a supplier, which are the ones that most influence the formulation of the supplier's innovation value. My assumption is that the supplier's innovation value depends on the technological capabilities of the supplier's own resources, from which a resource-based innovation value can be formulated. It depends on the supplier's ability to communicate, which can be a network innovation value, which is not only the proper formatting and transfer of own resources to the buyer, but also the transfer of other network resources to the buyer company. Third, the supplier's innovation value depends on how close the innovation cooperation between the parties is, how much the customer's innovation needs and expectations match those of the supplier.

In this paper I examined the assumed basic relationship between supplier innovation value and market success of innovation. So, on the basis of exploratory research and theoretical synthesis I formulated the following hypotheses:

1. The extent of supplier involvement in the buyer's innovation processes has a positive effect on the market success of the buyer's innovation.
2. The supplier's innovation value has a positive impact on the market success of buyer innovation.
3. The extent of supplier involvement in the buyer's innovation process has a positive impact on the supplier's innovation value.

For testing the external model and performing reliability and validity tests, I performed confrontational factor analysis and then removed the 0.5 factor weight indicators, observing the higher validity that can be obtained by removal.

DATA AND METHODS

The research consisted of two elements: a case study analysis and a corporate questionnaire survey. During the sampling, the economic branch chosen was the machine

industry and, more specifically, the production of parts. This industry, besides playing an important role in the Hungarian economy, is traditionally characterized by networking. A close relationship between assembler and supplier companies is typical of this industry worldwide. (Kim, 2014) For many components, development, deployment, and open innovation processes are shared with external partners. The main population is made up of large and medium-sized enterprises that start with the TEÁOR number 28–30. (It means companies whose main activities: manufacture of machinery and equipment, manufacture of motor vehicles, manufacture of other transport equipment.)

The exploratory research was a case study analysis of business relationships between a machine tool manufacturer and its customers. During the data collection, I conducted structured interviews with procurement managers working in manufacturing in the North Hungary region. Nine large and medium-sized enterprises located in Hungary were included Each of the companies in the sample is engaged in the production of vehicle and automotive parts. Respondents have years of experience in procurement, logistics and production planning, make purchasing decisions and influence supplier selection.

Then I conducted a corporate questionnaire. The written questionnaire was distributed to all other companies in Hungary in the sampled sector. The population is made up of large and medium-sized enterprises that start with the number of TEÁORs 28-30. The number of companies contacted was 516. There were 58 responses to the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 11.24%. Each of the responding companies has been carrying out some innovation activity in the last five years. Data collection took place between February and April 2018. The data was processed and the hypotheses tested by PLS-SEM.

The main topics of questionnaire were: general innovation activity and main supplier and supplier characteristics, supplier capabilities - costs of technology and relationship, innovation relationship, supplier contribution to innovation process and value of innovation, market success of innovations. Measuring scales were a 5-step Likert scale in each case.

RESULTS

Based on the exploratory research it can be said that similarly to business relationships, the supplier's innovation value is unique in each relationship and will be characterized by a specific relationship. Companies have different weight weights for individual factors that influence value creation.

The supplier participates in several and continuous cooperation, but manages the relationship with some customers as a priority and relies not only on its own resources but also on the resources of its own suppliers.

Depending on the factors that are of greater importance, and the extent to which the customer's innovation needs and supplier competencies match, we can distinguish the value of innovation driven by customer demand as well as the supplier value-based innovation value that carries a core innovation value or some additional innovation value.

A proper meeting of customer innovation needs and supplier capabilities (technology, network) creates value for supplier innovation that has a major impact on the success of the innovation process in the market.

The supplier's innovation value depends on the customer's innovation need, the supplier's resource-based innovation value, and the supplier's network-based innovation value. Improving and influencing these dependent factors is the common interest and responsibility of the partners; based on these, different supplier innovation values can be classified into larger groups.

As confirmed by the previous findings, the information generated and obtained through daily cooperation with suppliers increasingly helps companies turn innovation into new innovation (Berghman et al. 2013). Innovation collaborations appear as value for companies.

Analyses show that indicators and variables meet expectations. Factor weights are in most cases above 0.7 but in no case lower than 0.4. The latent variables correspond to the thresholds for CR (>0.7), AVE (>0.5), and Cronback alpha (>0.7), as illustrated in Table 1. When examining the reliability and validity of the above-mentioned four indicators, the variables and their indicators are above the minimum levels required. When checking the discriminatory validity, the cross-weight validity (the correlation between the indicator and the latent variable was always greater than the correlation between the indicator and any other latent variable), and the Fornell-Larcker criterion was met (latent variables were sufficiently separated) and the HTMT index was acceptable (all values were below 0.9). Since the indicators and the variables meet the required criteria (Henseler et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2011, 2012, 2017), I decided to accept them.

Table 1
Testing validity and reliability

Variables / Indicators	Factor weight	CR	AVE	Cronbach alpha
	>0.5 (min. 0.4)	>0.7	>0.5	>0.7
Innovative Value of Supplier		**0.876**	**0.638**	**0.874**
ké1_1	**0.774**			
ké1_3	**0.747**			
ké1_4	**0.874**			
ké1_5	**0.796**			
Market Success of Innovation		**0.908**	**0.529**	**0.915**
ks1_1	**0.762**			
ks1_2	**0.786**			
ks1_3	**0.837**			
ks1_4	**0.558**			
ks1_5	**0.533**			
ks1_6	**0.846**			
ks1_7	**0.743**			
ks1_8	**0.608**			
ks1_9	**0.794**			
Supplier Contribution		**0.923**	**0.675**	**0.930**
bi1_1	**0.924**			
bi1_2	**0.886**			
bi1_3	**0.655**			
bi1_4	**0.721**			
bi1_5	**0.628**			
bi1_6	**1.032**			

Source: own data

Table 2
Testing the significance of path coefficients

Path	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Innovative Value of Supplier -> Market Success of Innovation	**0.716**	**0.738**	**0.060**	**11.845**	**0.000**
Supplier Contribution -> Supplier Innovation Value	**0.687**	**0.705**	**0.101**	**6.799**	**0.000**
Supplier Contribution -> Market Success of Innovation	**0.492**	**0.522**	**0.095**	**5.165**	**0.000**

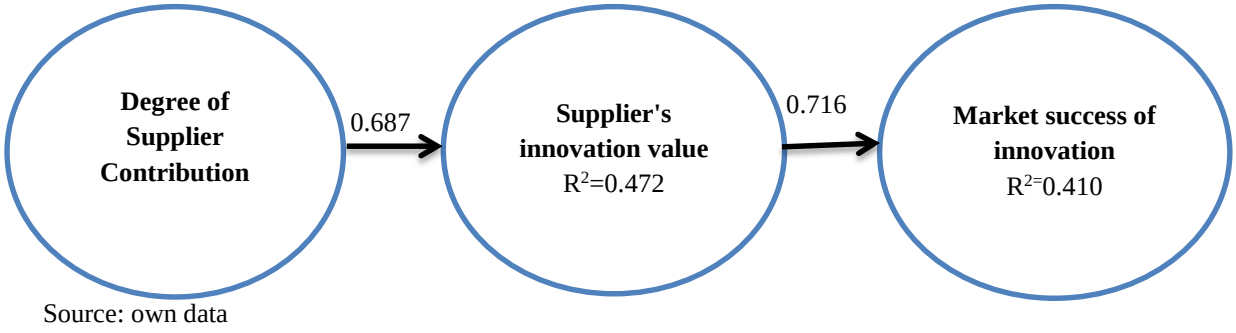
Source: own data

After validity and reliability analyses, it can be concluded that the external model's reliability and validity criteria are adequate, so the resulting relationships can be generalized.

In the tests of the internal model, the results of the tests of the individual path are first presented, followed by the analysis of the effects between latent variables. According to the model, the supplier's contribution to the innovation of the customer has an impact on the supplier's innovation value, and the innovation value of the supplier has an impact on the market success of innovation.

The significance of path coefficients was tested by bootstrap sampling. The number of sub-samples used was 5,000, as suggested in guidelines in the literature (Henseler et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2011, 2012, 2017).

In the first step, I examined the interactions between suppliers, the supplier's innovation value and the market success of innovation. The results of the p values (Table 2) show significant effects at 5% significance level.



Source: own data

Figure 1. Effects of supplier involvement, supplier innovation value and market success of innovation

Considering the significant effects, it can be said that when examining the standardized path coefficients (β) of the model, there are direct positive effects between latent variables. The supplier's contribution to the innovation value of the supplier is strongly influenced by (β = 0.687). The innovation value of the supplier has a stronger impact on the market success of innovation (β = 0.716) than the supplier contribution to the innovation process (β = 0.492). Both effects are strong. Supplier co-operation has an indirect impact on the market success of innovation (0.687 * 0.716) through the supplier's innovation value. The relations are illustrated in Figure 1.

By examining the indicator f2, the significance of the effects can be determined. In this case, both the innovation value of the supplier and the market success of innovation (f2=1.052), as well as the supplier's contribution and the innovation value of the supplier (f2=0.894), are significant.

With regard to the explained variance, the supplier's innovation value in the customer innovation process is explained by 47.2 %. The market success of innovation is explained by 41% of the supplier's innovation value, which can be considered a medium-strong explanatory force.

Conclusions and Limitations of the Research

Research on network collaboration is increasingly focusing on customer-supplier relationships. Most studies report positive effects on supplier involvement in the customer innovation process. The innovation capabilities of the customer companies are increasingly dependent on the capabilities and resources of their suppliers (Narasimhan, 2013). Therefore, choosing the right supplier is a very important point. The selection process and subsequent decisions and co-operation can be facilitated by an evaluation system that outlines the value of a supplier's innovation in terms of suppliers and relationships. To do this, the following information is needed: the supplier's technology and network properties, how these capabilities to make collaborations, and how to use and utilize each other's resources to help create shared value, advance innovation, and thus gain competitive advantage.

Innovation cooperation is becoming more and more common in Hungarian companies, and the importance of innovation cooperation with the supplier is increasing. “Traditional” purchasing thinking is still present, but the development of a small and narrow supply chain is increasingly prevalent.

Typical in practice the increasing number of organizational innovations and organizational changes aimed at facilitating joint innovation and the development of a similar network value system. However, it is not enough to create a similar organizational structure; new innovation business models must also be developed.

In general market practice is increasingly showing that companies are outsourcing some of their production, citing capacity shortages. However, this is followed by continuous supplier development, continuous advisory and control activities. Thanks to a closer relationship, the customer's innovation process can be more efficient.

There is a positive, medium-strong relationship between the supplier's innovation value and the level of supplier involvement. Innovation cooperation involves common innovation processes between the supplier and buyer, the continuity and intensity of these processes, the meeting of customer and supplier innovation needs and offers. So the closer the innovation of the two parties is, the higher the value of the supplier's innovation value.

The results reinforce the approach that innovation must become market-driven. It can be stated that technological innovations are still predominant in Hungarian corporate practice, but perhaps the integration of organizational and marketing innovations has started, if not always in a conscious way.

The limitation of the research to the generalization is that the investigation took place among the machine manufacturing companies linked to the Hungarian automotive industry. Further sector inquiries may reveal factors that have additional influencing natures or may reveal sector-specificity to the buyer-supplier relations.

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