

**The Relationship Paradigm :
Conceptualisation and Operationalisation**

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Abstract

Relationship as a quiproquo on mutual promises

This research focuses on relationship as an exchange dynamic in networks systems. Relationship is defined as a quiproquo on mutual promises independently from exchange. Relational promises are perceived through four a priori dimensions: political, social, economical and individual (LISE Model). The local content of the promises is identified using the typical ideal methodology. The quiproquo intensity between suppliers and customers is measured quantitatively and qualitatively using relationships gaps tools. The main results of an implementation on a sample of customers and suppliers in the automotive industry are presented.

Interaction, relationships, networks encapsulate historically the major research thrusts of the IMP Group (Turnbull, Ford, Cunningham, 1996).

The attention and interest in networks today is explained by the fact that networks correspond to a more efficient articulation between the complexity linked to a hyper-division of work and the integration of resources used in value creation. This revolution makes connection and relationship the principle dynamism in networking. (Easton, 1992, Möller, Wilson, 1995 ; Turnbull, Ford, Cunningham, 1996). Therefore the agenda for the researchers is to understand the nature of relationship (Turnbull, Ford, Cunningham, 1996).

This work-in-progress paper proposes to operationalise the concept of relationship in order to describe, explain, anticipate and resolve the relational issues linked to the different degrees of commitment or of the withdrawal on behalf of the suppliers and / or clients in a relationship.

The operationalisation of this concept will be done in four different stages :

- a) Defining relationship as a quiproquo on mutual promises independently from exchange (Weber, 1922 ; Grönross, 1994).
- b) Demonstrating how these promises are perceived through four relational dimensions: political, social, individual and economical (LISE Model).
- c) Showing how the local content of these promises could be described as being “typical-ideals”.
- d) Evaluating relational gaps using different research methodologies.

The results of an implementation are presented evaluating the relationship between OEM's, first range suppliers and second or fourth range suppliers in the automotive industry in France.

I- THE CONCEPT OF RELATIONSHIP AS A QUIPROQUO OF MUTUAL PROMISES

In the move from the transactional paradigm to the relational paradigm, marketing is confronted with the emergence of a new paradigm (Grönroos, 1994 ; Möller, 1998). The relational paradigm, however, does not seem yet to be capable of taking the place of the exchange paradigm. This limitation seems to be due to the lack of definition of a relationship as an autonomous concept as opposed to an exchange, in any of its possible forms.

1. Relationship is prior to exchange

The exchange paradigm, as an object of marketing, (Bagozzi, 1975 ; Pandya, Dholakia, 1992) identifies different exchange situations in which a relationship would be omnipresent and yet not recognised as such anywhere.

Bagozzi (1975) recognises that exchange is nothing more than a modality of relationship, exchange being embedded in said relationships. This shows itself to be true , and even more so, in the systems of generalised exchange that presuppose interconnected relationship networks that base themselves on « systems of economical and social relationships, both conscious and unconscious » to function.

The essential limit of the typology of exchanges created by Pandya and Dholakia (1992) comes from the correspondence that would be created between the exchange situation and the relationship models, when in fact neither of these two can be reduced or simplified to each other. In this way, market exchange implies, for the most of the time, a pre-existing relationship. On the other

hand, relational exchanges described as being linked to long-term relationships, shared values, co-operation and an intense communication ; all of which don't correspond to the established practices.

2. Relationship is not exchange

Several researchers for the IMP identify the forms of relationships (Möller et Wilson, 1995) or the contents of a relationship (Easton, 1992) all without defining the actual concept of the said relationship. The multiple classifications of exchange relationships generally lead us to distinguish two notably different forms of relationships - « Consumer relationship marketing and interorganisationnal relationship marketing», both of which bring Möller (1998) to the point of rejecting the unification of the paradigms. As for the description of the content of the relationship, it leaves the question of the identification of the preconditions for the existence of an inter-firm relationship (Easton, 1992) to be answered.

And yet from our point of view, the addressee of the exchange or the nature of the object exchanged is independent from the relationship that is found to be present - before, during and after - in any of the possible forms of exchange that exist. In our opinion, the main limitation is to confuse relationship as an exchange and relationship as a relation.

In this way, the relationship concept, not having been independently defined from exchange, can not be taken as an autonomous unit of analysis. Only the most frequently quoted definition of Marketing Relationship opens the way to a clear definition of the concept of relationship : « Marketing is to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and others partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by a mutual exchange of fulfilment of promises » (Grönross, 1994).

3. A clarification test : a taxonomy of flow situations

The analysis of the literature that exists on the different forms of exchange allows us to create a tree diagram of flow situations independently of the relationship concept (see figure 1). The definitions are proposed and founded on the oppositions between the words.

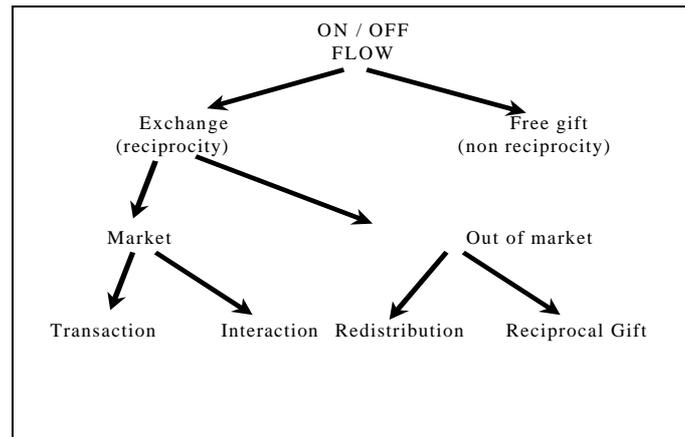


Figure 1 : Proposition the taxonomy of flows

Exchange will strictly relate back to reciprocity without any confusion about the free gift, which is characterised by its lack of reciprocity (Cova, Salle, 1996). The *marketing* exchanges are subject to the laws of supply and demand, and their production and encounter is freely practised in public. On the other hand, there are *non-marketing* exchanges : those that don't comply with the law of supply and demand but remain public through redistribution (*redistributive exchange within members*), and those that do comply with the law of supply and demand but remain private gifts (*reciprocal exchange between members*) (Pandya and Dholakia, 1992).

Within marketing exchanges, the *transactions* correspond to the close transfers in the pure and perfect markets (Stock Exchange) according to the « take it or leave it » rule. The opposite of transaction would be *interaction*. *Inter* (Latin : inter / between) expresses that the participants concerned in the exchange are no longer anonymous but identify one another. Interaction signifies « to act between », « likewise towards each other » ; when interaction takes place, the participants are involved, and make themselves involved. On the other hand, *trans* means « to act above and beyond the other person » ; in a transaction, the participants are not involved, and it is only the output of the exchange that interests them.

The hypothesis according to which all flow necessarily and simultaneously includes a portion of exchange and of true gift giving, marketing and non-marketing exchange, transaction and interaction, redistribution and reciprocal gift giving (Easton, Araujo, 1992) with varying proportions remains to be looked at in greater depth.

4. The relationship as a quiproquo of mutual promises.

The relationship concept is defined independently from flux. This leads to the distinction of the relationship as a story from the relationship for which the model would be the metaphor of love : the *discovery* of the other, *meeting* the other, *interaction* between each other, *dependence* of one with regard to the other, mutual *interdependence*, and finally solidarity of interest, moral community, if not

fusion. These different moments of a relational story correspond to different stages in the life cycle of the relationship (Dwyer, Shurr, Oh, 1987). The relationship as a story confirms that the relationship is prior to any sort of flow, and therefore autonomous in relation to the flow. The relationship recited in this way confirms that the relationships is one of perception, and so not of tangible flow. The tangible flows do not constitute for a form of relationship, but rather an exception than a rule when we consider the multiple relational proliferations conceivable.

The relationship as a flow potential is born from an uncertainty which applies to the potential participants in a flow - does this mean a *quiproquo* ? The exchange is defined (Bagozzi, 1975) as a *quid pro quo* : « something for something » or « this for that ». The relationship is defined as a *quiproquo* ; that is to say « who for what ? » or « what for who ? », or even « who for who ? ». The relationship directs us back to the question concerning the « who » prior to any « what ».

The relational *quiproquo* is founded on the promises each and every individual directs to another. According to Max Weber (1922), « *the significant content of a social relationship can be based on a harmony created by a mutual commitment. This leads us to believe that those who participate in the said relationship make (between themselves or otherwise) each other promises (Versprechungen) which have their worth for their future behaviour* » (Weber, 1922).

These mutual promises are a source of mistake born from different meanings given to the other's promises : « *this does not, under any circumstances, mean that the individuals participating in an activity in which one would model oneself on the other(s) attribution, in this particular case, a significant content identical to the social relationship.* » (Max Weber, 1922). In this sense, the relationship is « *objectively 'unilateral' from both points of view* » (Weber, 1922).

These relational quiproquos are at the foundation of the relational uncertainty in time, for example : « *the significant content of a social relationship may vary... The significant content may also be partially endurable and partially variable* » (Weber, 1922). More fundamentally, the relationship is defined in its essence as a **non-correspondence** « : *a social relationship that is entirely and without reservations based on a significantly compatible attitude on both sides will never, in reality, be anything other than an extreme case... [a relation] is only objectively 'mutual' on condition that, obviously, the significant contents 'correspond' to each other* » (Weber, 1922). If the correspondence is an exception, the gap then becomes the relational rule. From this comes intangibility, fragility, the feeling of arbitrary power and instability and the substantial volatility of all relationships..

II- THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE CONTENT OF RELATIONAL PROMISES THROUGH TYPICAL IDEALS

The relationship defined as a quiproquo of mutual promises asks, in itself, the question concerning the identification of relational promises. This directs us back to two more questions : (a) What are the *a priori dimensions* through which the participants perceive relational promises ? (b) Is it possible to identify *typical relational ideals* corresponding to local customs.

1. The four *a priori* dimensions of relationships : The LISE model

Let us consider organisations or exchanges as places of « relational concretion », the researchers distinguish several dimensions in these forms of relationship : political, economical, social, psychological, historical, anthropological ... (March, 1965 ; Pandya, Dholakia, 1992). We suggest to retain four dimensions in a relationship : *political, social, individual and economical*. Each and every participant would then judge the relational promises that are made, explicitly or implicitly, using these four dimensions of which the meaning is yet to be specified.

a) The political dimension of relational promises concerns the rules relative to power. The function of power is to regulate conflicts or disagreements over the share of the creation of validity. The conflicting resolutions are judged according to the principle of legitimacy founded on the idea of equity or justice (Rawls, 1971 ; Hakansson, Ötsberg, 1975 ; Dwyer, Shurr, Oh, 1987, Gundlach, Murphy, 1993 ; Möller, Wilson, 1995). The involved participants designate themselves as citizens and declare themselves members of a political body.

b) The social dimension of relational promises directs us either to the idea communities (*communalisation*) to which the participants feel that they belong (Maffesoli, 1988, Cova, 1996), or to the idea of organisations that regroup the *players* that share common objectives (*sociation*) (Weber, 1922). The objective of the social function is to create relationships or links through socialisation and co-ordination (Barnard, 1938). The convergence that is obtained by this is judged through the feeling of *integration* felt by the players, and measured by his or her level of membership or belonging.

c) The individual dimension of relational promises corresponds to the satisfaction acquired by the individuals (Barnard, 1938 ; Pandya, Dholakia, 1992). By the term 'individual', the *person* defined as a basic unit of a human whole is understood. It is possible to say that this unit is particular and unique - strictly different from all others. The object of the individual relationship is the identity that, for example, is inspired by professional cultures. The *satisfaction* of the individual connected to

his level of personal accomplishment is measured by the level of his or her commitment (*Exit, voice or loyalty*, Hirsman, 1970).

d) The economic dimension of relational promises is perceived according to the granting of rare resources in the objective of the creation of validity. Efficiency is perceived by agents of which the essential medium is rarity. The *economical agents* evaluate the rules of the relationship which is proposed to them in connection with the final purpose or the value that they propose to reach measuring it by indicators of *effectiveness*.

We propose to call this perceptual a priori model of relational promises 'LISE Model', corresponding to Legitimacy, Integration, Satisfaction, Effectiveness.

2. The identification of the typical relationship ideals : its implementation to the relationship between supplier and client in the car industry in France

Max Weber suggests to identify the typical relationship ideals using the following method :
« *the significant content that constitutes durably for a social relation may be expressed in 'maxims' that the participants expect to see observed on average or in an approximately significant manner by the partner or partners and according to which they themselves carry out (on average or approximately) their own business* » (WEBER, 1922).

The analysis of the relationships between supplier and client in the car industry allowed us to identify **three typical ideals** on the basis an analysis of literature concerning local customs : the typical ideal 1 '*Giving orders to subcontractors*'; the typical ideal 2 '*customer against supplier*' ; typical ideal 3 '*Partners together with the ally*' (see table 1).

Dimensions	Typical Ideal 1	Typical Ideal 2	Typical Ideal 3
<i>Political System</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designating participants • Referencing norms • Justifying model 	« <i>Wave 1</i> » Giving order /subcontractor Hierarchy Tradition	« <i>Wave 2</i> » Client / Supplier Power struggle Natural Selection	« <i>Wave 3</i> » Ally / Partner Co-operation Sharing Risks
<i>Social System</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image of the firm • Relationships with competitors • Co-ordination modes between participants 	« <i>Position Firm</i> » Isolated or dual firm Isolation Independence	« <i>Market Firm</i> » Competitive Market Total War Isolated Optimisation	« <i>Network Firm</i> » Integrated network Interest in synergy Integrating objectives
<i>Economical System</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production Tool • Connection with the final product • Approach to Innovation 	« <i>Craft work</i> » Limited production Discontinued constrictions Repetition	« <i>Ford</i> » Mass production Optimisation of continuous processes Retention	« <i>Toyota</i> » Variability Construction of flexible tools Distribution
<i>Individual System</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideal of me or founder myth • Key routines • Search for satisfaction 	« <i>Production</i> » Production Engineer Doing the job well Survival (dependency)	« <i>Profit</i> » Manager administrator Reduce costs Diversification (opportunism)	« <i>Project</i> » Visionary leader Innovate and continue Commitment

Table1 : The Three typical ideals of relationships according to the LISE Model

The principal characteristics of these typical ideals are the following :

Political : the typical ideal giver of orders to the subcontractors is characterised by the situation of dependency from the point of view of the subcontractor ; the typical ideal of customer against supplier is based on a relationship of power ; the ideal of the partners with the allies is presented as a position where gains and risks are *shared*.

Social : the typical ideal giver of orders to the subcontractors corresponds to the position-firm isolated in relation to the other players ; the typical ideal of customer against supplier is based on an optimisation opposed to the other players in the market, customers or others ; the typical ideal 3 partners with the allies is founded on a strong common integration within the generalised exchange networks.

Individual : the typical ideal 1 is based on technical, production or industrial values, ; the second on financial or managerial values ; the third on values that depend on an idea of a project supported and maintained by continuous innovation based on an entrepreneurial vision.

Economical, the giver of orders to the subcontractors relationship within craft industry production ; the ‘client against supplier’ relationship in the mass production model focused on the mass-produced standardised series ; the typical ideal ‘partner together with ally’ in the Toyota model of flexible production.

III- THE EVALUATION OF RELATIONAL QUIPROQUOS BY THE RELATIONAL GAP METHOD

The evaluation of relational quiproquos aims to resolve the central question in the inter-organisational environment : how is it possible to evaluate the quality of a relationship between supplier and customer in order to anticipate their future level of commitment ?(Dwyer, Shuh, Oh, 1987 ; Ford, 1990, Cova, Salle, 1992, Turnbull et alii, 1996). This question is crucial in the circumstances of continuous innovation and it concerns a large amount of enterprises. An investigative survey, based on self-administered postal questionnaires and completed during individual one to one interviews, was conducted using a sample set of 290 enterprises all working in the automotive field. The interest of such an observation in the automotive industry is linked to the fact the it is one of the industries that has known numerous relational crisis that reveal to us the implicit relational models. Contesting a relationship allows us to reveal it. The principal results are displayed below :

2. The relational gaps that come from flat sorting.

Flat sortings reveal the collective relational models opposed between the purchasers from constructors or from first range equipment manufacturers and second and third range suppliers. *Concerning the suppliers that completed the questionnaire*, our attention is drawn to the heterogeneity of the average typical relational ideals (see Table 2).

Suppliers	Assertions that were retained most	Assertions that were least retained
<i>Political</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TI2 indistinct supplier • TI2 Power struggle • TI3 Quest for a balance • TI3 Co-operation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TI3 privileged partner • TI3 Sharing of risks and benefits • TI2 Conflict for the sake of survival • TI1 Submission
<i>Social</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TI2 Diversification • TI1 lack of competitive comparability • TI1 Strict independence • TI2 Collective Innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TI3 Selective Network • TI2 Competitive battle • TI2 Fight to impose one's rules • TI2 Random innovation
<i>Economical</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TI2 Productive system's opportunism • TI2 Individual standardisation • TI3 Limited productions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TI3 Synergy around a common interest • TI3 Integrated tight flow • TI2 Automated processes
<i>Individual</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TI2 Diversification • TI1 Production • TI3 Continuous innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TI3 / 1 Commitment or dependency • TI2 Profit

Table 2 : The identification of the most and least retained maxims by the suppliers that completed the questionnaire taken from flat sortings.

Concerning the purchasers that completed the questionnaire, the totality of the answers correspond to the third typical ideal. This is of the norm to the extent that this model was created from the point

of view of the purchasers position on the subject. However, the majority of the purchasers that completed the questionnaire consider that « *the most essential factor is to create a competition among suppliers in order to maintain their balance of power.*» (TI 2) rather than « *share the risks and benefits with them* » (TI 3). It is through these gaps in comparison with the ‘norms’ that it is possible to identify the indications of the internal relational quiproquos of the purchasers themselves.

The quantitative relational gap indications are calculated by comparing the number of answers chosen by the suppliers and the number of answers chosen by the purchasers from the same question category. The more the ration moves away from, the stronger the relational quiproquo. A negative ration indicates that the suppliers answers were less numerous than those of the purchaser from a given category. The synthetic relational gap indications by dimension correspond to the average analytical relational gap ratios. The synthetic relational gap indications by typical ideal obeys the same calculation convention.

The relational gap indications show us that the relational quiproquos are at a maximum for the political dimension (5.76), strong for the economical dimension (2.31), less for the social dimension (1.79) and very limited for the individual dimension (1.07) (see table 3)

Dimensions	SUPPLIER % of answers by TI	PURCHASER % of answers by TI	Analytical relational gap ratio	Synthetic relational gap indication by dimension
Political • TI1 • TI2 • TI3	27 % 36 % 37 %	2 % 21 % 77 %	13,5 1,71 (2.08)	5.76
Social • TI1 • TI2 • TI3	41 % 33 % 26 %	24 % 21 % 55 %	1,71 1,57 (2.11)	1.79
Economical • TI1 • TI2 • TI3	29 % 36 % 35 %	9 % 21 % 70 %	3,22 1,71 (2)	2.31
Individual • TI1 • TI2 • TI3	33 % 37 % 30 %	22 % 38 % 40 %	1,50 1 (1.33)	1.07
synthetic relational gap indication by typical ideal			TI1 4.98 TI2 1.49 TI3 (1.84)	

Table 3 : Relational gap indications resulting from flat sorting.

3. The relational gaps that come from crossed sorting.

Crossed sortings confirm the pertinence of the typical ideals of any given relationship insofar as ; (a) the number of hybrid models remains inferior to the number of theoretical models, (b) the number of people who completed the questionnaire in the entirety of the hybrid models represents a very limited part of the total amount of people that completed the questionnaire (< 25 %) ; (c) not one out of any of the hybrid models brings together a significant amount of the people that filled in the questionnaire (> 20 %). It is only in the social dimension, and with the suppliers that completed the questionnaire, that we can see a coherent hybrid model, insofar as a significant amount of people that completed the questionnaire who were able to find some sort of a similarity in their answers (see table 4)

SUPPLIERS who completed the questionnaire	People that completed the questionnaire with the initial typical ideals	People that completed the questionnaire with the hybrid typical ideals
<i>Political</i>	24	4 (1 model)
<i>Social</i>	20	8 (1 model)
<i>Economical</i>	23	3 + 2 (2 models)
<i>Individual</i>	22	4 + 2 (2 models)

Table 4 : Distribution of suppliers that completed the questionnaire with the relationship models according to dimensions

The results are comparable for the purchasers who completed the questionnaire that can be found in the proposed models. The typical ideal 3 dominates, without a question, the political and economical dimensions, and is the most fragile on a social level and above all on a individual level. This indicates that the level of coherence of the relational rules and regulations is not quite identical depending on the dimensions of the relationship. These ‘relational holes’ simultaneously relate back to obvious uncertainties but also to the different levels of freedom in mutual arrangements.

By highlighting the *new relational gap indications*, we can confirm the gaps obtained from the flat sorting, increasing the opposition between the relationship model demonstrated by the purchasers of economical and political materials (a model of almost monolithic character) and the heterogeneity of their suppliers’ reference models. These relational divergences seem to be compensated by a relational proximity at an individual level, if not somewhat social. We could now question, not only that which separates the people concerned, but more importantly what could possibly advance them to finally work together. (see Figure 2)

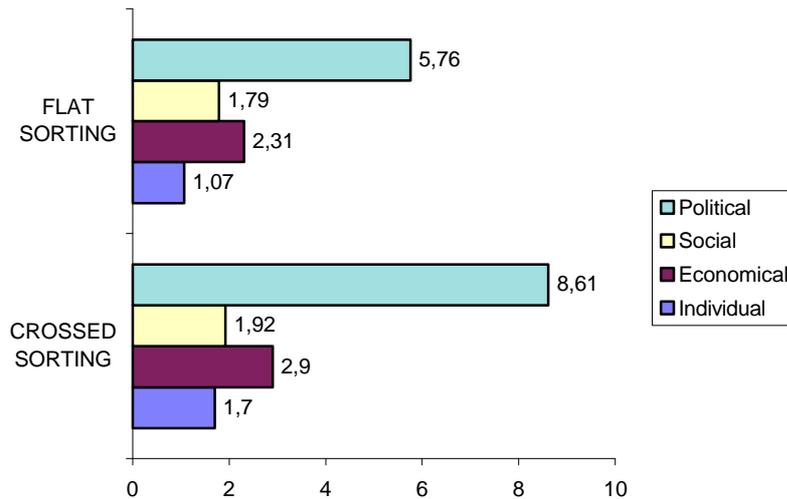


Figure 2 : The evolution of the relational gap indications comparing flat sorting and crossed sorting

4. The relational gaps that come from a typological analysis

A typological analysis was carried out that resulted in a separation into two significant classes

:

a) A first class of people who completed the questionnaire (50 % of the sample taken) ; this class corresponds to the suppliers that maintain that they are second range, work specifically in the automotive field, are strongly committed to one dominant client that represents more than half of their business, recognise a decrease in their annual turnover in the last three years and expect a deterioration in their profitability and yield over the next three years. The relational gap is at a maximum for these people. The analysis of the variables that are opposed to this class illustrate a mass rejection of the third typical ideal (partner together with the ally), and in particular in the political dimension, by those who, themselves, are the most exposed to its rhetoric. (See Table 9)

SUPPLIERS Class 1	Test Value
Characteristics opposed to the class	
<i>Political</i>	
• TI3 : the supplier is considered as a partner.	-2.65
• TI3 : the relationship with the clients is one where the search for a balance is apparent.	-2.08
• TI3 : the clients accept sharing the risks and the benefits with the supplier.	-1.37
<i>Social</i>	
• TI3 : the firm enters into common development programs with its competitors.	-2.65
<i>Economical</i>	
• TI1 : the purchaser expects the supplier to be specialised in the limited production lines that are labour based and not very automatable.	-1.98
• TI3 a chain can function in tight flow at all levels of the chain	-1.84

Table 5 : Contributivonal variables opposed to Class 1

b) A second class (32 % of the sample taken) corresponds to the suppliers that are more particularly linked with the vehicle industry field, have a field stature of less than 33 %, do not have a principal client that claims more than 33 % of their business and plan to maintain their profitability and yield over the next three years. The relational gap will be smaller for this group that works in the *vehicle industry* field. These people, who completed the survey, see themselves in the first typical ideal for the economical and individual dimensions, but put a large emphasis on the third typical ideal when dealing with political and social levels. On the other hand, there is an apparent agreement in which the first and second typical ideals are rejected. Nevertheless two questions remain : (a) Can it be said that the third typical ideal is no more than an updated form of the first typical ideal ? (b) How can the possible modifications of the clients principal strategy be ascertained in this domain ? Is all this really about a misunderstanding more so than a quiproquo ?

5. Cross-checking by analysing the content

Analysing the content has been based on two sources : the spontaneous responses obtained by the self-administered questionnaire and the one to one interviews.

a) The spontaneous responses from the self-administered questionnaire

The answers obtained confirm the existence of relational models and gaps.

As concerns the *suppliers who answered the questionnaire*, those who work specifically for the automotive industry clearly and frankly reject the reality of the model that comes from the third

typical ideal, whereas others confirm the duality of perception in the heavy goods vehicle field. (see table 6)

Supplier	Contents
GE101	<p>« the automobile market (constructors and equipment manufacturers) is, in our country at least, a very special market. Behind what might seem to be an innovative (lean production, partnership, etc.) and very pertinent view point in essence (client-supplier co-operation for continuous improvement and innovation works very well in other sectors), we find the <i>facts</i> :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an incredibly brutal <u>power struggle</u> (one must never comment on a specification notice or even bring about some change in it, low prices above all, refusal to pay for research and development work, etc.) • a complete <u>infidelity</u> (when we don't need you any more, you go back to being a supplier just like all the others, whatever the past partnership may have been) • a very <u>short term</u> vision (minimise the price of investment rather than optimise the process) ».
GE701	<p>« Our firm deals only with <i>heavy goods vehicles</i>, and not <i>automobiles</i>. The client to supplier relationship could be evaluated as <i>classically industrial</i> and have no relationship with the <i>power struggle</i> that is typically found in the automotive industry as you seem to suggest, by your questions. Furthermore, we consider ourselves as suppliers of innovation and not of standard products ».</p>
GE1101	<p>The relationship that we have with our automobile clients (interior designers) are very varied. Some of them have quite drastic ways of dealing with matters and don't always respect the work that is provided to them by their suppliers with respect to deadlines, whereas it is these same clients that ask for extra supplies or supplies ahead of schedule with a deadline that is impossible to meet, and where the reason is their own forgetfulness - all this and we are still expected to conform to ISO 9000 ».</p>

Table 6 : Samples of answers from the questionnaire given to suppliers

The spontaneous answers on behalf of the purchasers illustrate well the different models that are proposed. One reminds us that the foundation of a partnership lies in the distribution of the wealth, which seems to echo a personal and relational quiproquo : « the supplier must always make a profit on the transactions he conducts with us » (third typical ideal). Another one distinguishes the models according to the level of standardisation and specificity of the product : « depending on whether we buy standard or innovative products, the way the suppliers act with us changes considerably ». Yet another one develops the second typical ideal model : the optimisation of the appropriateness between supply and demand by a joint external outsourcing move, and an internal adaptation move.

b) The analysis of the content of the one to one interviews illustrates in a very significant manner the typical ideals concerning reference and relational gaps.

As far as suppliers are concerned, we can take into account the incomprehension on behalf of the suppliers that change from the position of « the givers of orders to the subcontractors » to a model that seems closer to « Client against Supplier ». Other interviews depict with a certain violence the relational gap born from the second typical ideal (TI2) which is wholly and entirely based on the power struggle. Yet others, conversely, demonstrate the disbelief sparked off by the seemingly successful implementation of the third typical ideal (TI3).

The content of the interviews with the purchases appears not to be as ample in relational gaps that arise. Certain 'classic' purchasers, with somewhat of an attachment to the second typical ideal, realise the limits of any sort of co-ordination solely founded on the technical constrictions without an integration of common investments. Other purchasers, inspired by the third typical ideal, are confronted with certain incoherences between their reference model and the difficulty of implementing it. These incoherences come from either the position of power that the supplier holds (in which the invitation to a 'winner / winner' relationship becomes a means by which they can make up for the frailty of their position) or, when the firm is in a powerful position, from the fact that they could also be brought to using this position in order to preserve its profit margins against unruly suppliers.

In all these cases, it is possible to identify the reference typical ideal brought about by each of the interlocutors and, at the same time, the different relational quiproquos that have a considerable variation of intensity.

IV- LIMITS AN MANAGERIAL INVOLVEMENT

1. The methodological limits of an operationalisation of the relationship concept.

A definition of the independent relation of the exchange reveals a hidden dimension that renders and exchange possible. But the apprehension of the relationship, in as far as a potential for exchange, makes a question more complex ; a question that, despite Bagozzi's (1975) and Pandya and Dholakia's (1992) contributions, still seems not to have been really explored. Do the dimensions of relational promises (the LISE model), as well as their definitions, have a value that is something other than conventional and, above all, can they be weighted ? As for relational typical ideals, their localised characteristic multiplies the often difficult renewal procedures. The quiproquo concept evaluates the relationship on the basis of that which separates more so than that which connects the players. That the perception of a relational gap could be predictive to the commitment or withdrawal of the players remains to be shown. In a practical sense, the apprehension of the relation gaps illustrates the interaction of the observer in relation to the observed. It is perceived by certain participants as an intrusion on their private space and is susceptible to decrease the uncertainty of

their behaviour and, therefore, their level freedom. Apprehending the relationship modifies it as much as it reveals it. The principal limitation of apprehending a relationship seems to be a methodological one.

2. Managerial interest in an operationalisation of the relationship concept.

The development of the client to supplier exchange models, based on the integration within the network, demands a continuous evaluation of the quality of the relationship as perceived by the actively involved participants. The proposed procedure would allow us to understand why the suppliers or the clients refuse to initiate exchanges between each other, independently of all objective economical considerations. Why, also, would a relationship develop more or less in harmony or, on the contrary, finish more or less brutally. The proposed tool remains to be validated on a larger sample firm and for a significantly longer time period, permitting us to identify the correlations between perception and behaviour. It would equally be necessary to compare the relationship according to the culture relative to the firm, sector or country.

V- CONCLUSIONS

The proposed research is an trial of a logical connection between concept, methods and tools based on the paradigm of relationships. Relationship is defined as a quiproquo of mutual promises, independent of all flow, but rendering it potentially possible. These promises are perceived by the active participants through a four dimensional filters and applying to the legitimacy of the distribution of wealth among the citizens, the social integration generated by the players, the satisfaction that is brought to the people concerned and the economic efficiency generated by the employees (the LISE model). This model opens the way to the structuring of the relational typical ideals that are partially contingent to cultures relative to the country, sector or firm. The relational quiproquos in connection with these typical ideals are apprehensible in the form of relational gaps through quantitative or qualitative methods. The value of this approach remains strongly linked to the methodologies available that give us the possibility to seize an object when the essential objective is to transform, if not make it one's own, all at the same instant we first catch a glimpse of it. This corroborates the fact that as a source of radical uncertainty caused by exchange, relationships make up for the central subject of marketing.

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