

Relationalism as a Marketing Strategy

An Empirical Study among Finnish Business-to-Business Firms

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Abstract

A host of business and industrial marketing literature has put long-term oriented, cooperative and bonded business relationships into research focus. Empirical field research - mainly in-depth case studies - has identified them as the dominating governance structure in most industrial business settings. In this study, the following research questions are set: 1) In a population of business-to-business marketing firms, what is the extent of firms that apply relational marketing practices and have been able to accumulate a high level of relationship assets?, 2) Are there any differences between various types of business-to-business firms regarding the relational marketing practices and accrued relationship assets? Relationalism of a marketing strategy is defined in terms of the cooperativeness of marketing practices and the level of accrued relationship assets within key business relationships in a specific business-to-business marketing context. The sample consisted of 212 business-to-business marketing firms in the Finnish metal and electrotechnical industry. MANOVA and ANOVA procedures were utilized in the study. The study revealed that the respondent companies are on the average rather relational in their marketing strategies. On the basis of our analysis of the marketing practices and accrued relationship assets of the firms in the Finnish metal and electrotechnical industry, a general conclusion can be made that differences between various types of firms were not substantially significant. No strong and clear differences were found in marketing practices and relationship assets between the groups of the employed independent variables. Although relationalism of the marketing strategy in terms of marketing practices/relationship assets and firm profitability seem to have a weak connection, our study cannot confirm the common belief that companies should strive towards the creation of close and bonded relationships with their key customers in order to be more profitable than their competitors. Rather, it seems to be so that in the business-to-business context where the markets are network-like, close relationships to key customers can be regarded more as a necessary condition to survive than a sufficient condition to succeed.

Keywords: marketing strategy, relationalism, business-to-business markets

Introduction

Relationalism as a marketing strategy has recently aroused a lot of interest among marketing researchers and practitioners. Generally, it has been stated that '21st century marketing' is poised for revolutionary changes in its organizational context as well as in its relationship with inter-organizational actors. The proposed changes are underpinned by the emergence of a network society, in which business success is argued to be increasingly dependent on alliance building and resource sharing (Castells 1996). Achrol and Kotler (1999) argue that, driven by a dynamic and knowledge-rich environment, hierarchical organizations are disaggregating into a variety of network forms, applying increasingly cooperative marketing strategies.

Consequently, an extensive and heterogeneous global literature has emerged on the relationship and network point of view to marketing (e.g. Coviello, Brodie, Danaher & Johnston 2002; Anderson, Håkansson & Johanson 1994; Morgan & Hunt 1994). A starting point for the relational approaches in marketing research is the proposition that business relationships may be situated in a 'marketing strategy continuum' (Grönroos 1994) or a 'range of marketing relationships' (Webster 1992). At one end of the continuum is the purely transactional market relationship, in which the customer and the seller focus on short-term economic exchange. At the other end, some authors place the mutually beneficial, long term -oriented business relationship with cooperative interaction strategies and a host of accrued relationship assets such as trust and commitment (Grönroos 1994; Gummesson 2001; cf. Kotabe, Martin & Domoto 2003). Other researchers go even further and see strategic alliances and vertical integration as the ultimate, predominantly hierarchical modes of relational governance (Webster 1992). The mentioned marketing strategy continuum can be related conceptually to the issue of how economic activities are organized through different modes of governance ranging from markets to hybrids to hierarchies (Williamson 1996).

Empirical research in different industries has clearly validated the basic postulate that relationships and networks act as the principal governance system within which most inter-organizational exchange takes place. However, more empirical studies in different kinds of industrial and national contexts are still needed. Consequently, we have set the research questions of the focal study as follows:

- (1) In a population of business-to-business marketing firms, what is the extent of firms that apply relational marketing practices and have been able to accumulate a high level of relationship assets?
- (2) Are there any differences between various types of business-to-business firms regarding the relational marketing practices and accrued relationship assets?

Theoretical Background: Relationalism as a Marketing Strategy

A host of business and industrial marketing literature has put long-term oriented, cooperative and bonded business relationships into research focus. Empirical field research - mainly in-depth case studies - has identified them as the dominating governance structure in most industrial business settings (Håkansson 1982; Turnbull & Valla 1986; Håkansson & Snehota 1995; Turnbull, Ford & Cunningham 1996). In general, the relationalism of a firm's marketing strategy can be defined in terms of the two constructs presented in the above research questions, i.e., the cooperativeness of marketing practices and the level of accrued relationship assets within key business relationships in a specific business-to-business marketing context.

Marketing Practices

The marketing practices of the firm have received research interest in recent marketing research (Coviello et al. 2002; Coviello, Brodie & Munro 2000). Coviello et al. (2002) offer a fourfold categorization of a firm's marketing practices into transaction marketing, database marketing, interaction marketing and network marketing. More specifically, Coviello et al. (2002) measure marketing practices through a framework focusing on the purpose of exchange, nature of communication, type of contact, duration of exchange, formality of exchange, managerial intent, managerial focus, managerial investment, and managerial level.

In our study, however, we operationalize the marketing practices of a firm through the adopted interaction strategies and the nature and state of the key interaction processes between the buyer and

the seller (including customer relationship management (CRM) and customer communication related issues). In studying interaction strategies, we adopt the threefold classification by Campbell (1985) of a firm's interaction strategies into competitive, cooperative and command postures, representing the traditional continuum from market to hybrid to hierarchy (Williamson 1996). Marketing strategy is considered to be relational if a company has developed long-term oriented relationships with its key customers, in which both parties conduct primarily cooperative interaction strategies.

Interaction strategies as defined above can be seen as relationship structures steering the interaction process between the seller and the buyer. The interaction process can be divided into three basic processes of exchange, coordination and adaptations (Möller & Wilson 1995). The term relational exchange refers to interlinked exchange episodes embedded into interactive relationships that are characterized by economic, social, legal, technical, informational and procedural bonds (Håkansson & Snehota 1995). Hence, if exchange between two interacting parties is reciprocal in its nature and if it occurs repeatedly and relatively regularly between the parties, the seller's marketing strategy is considered as relational.

Coordination processes are those by which the interacting organizations harmonize their actions and decisions in order to achieve the expected benefits from the business relationship. Such processes include decisions on the terms of exchange between participant organizations, norms and procedures concerning how the exchange processes are to be carried out, and ad hoc responses to conflicts and relevant environmental changes (Möller & Wilson 1995). Consequently, coordination refers to the development and use of mechanisms that facilitate the conduct and control of exchange processes. If the coordination of activities between two business parties is well developed, the marketing strategy is considered as relational.

Adaptation processes relate to how interactants modify resources or ways of operating in order to benefit more from a business relationship. Consequently, adaptations may be made in either the elements exchanged or in the process of exchange, for example in products or services, in financial arrangements, and in information routines or social relations (Håkansson 1982; Johanson & Mattsson 1987; Håkansson & Snehota 1995). If the state of adaptation is high and the participants are willing to make different kinds of adaptations, the seller's marketing strategy is considered as relational.

Relationship Assets

Relationship assets are conceptualized here in terms of actor bonds, activity links, resource ties, inter-organizational trust, commitment, and climate for relationship learning. A well-performing relationship exists if both the customer and the supplier are satisfied with the relationship's effectiveness (i.e., doing the right things) and efficiency (i.e., doing things the right way) (Ruekert & Walker 1987; Selnes & Sallis 2003). Thus, the purpose of relationship assets is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the business relationship and in the end, the overall performance of the interacting companies as a whole. Actor bonds, activity links and resource ties are the elements that emergence in business networks as interorganizational relationships evolve and cooperation develops (Håkansson & Snehota 1995).

In our study, the concepts of trust, commitment and climate for learning are the main elements of relational assets. The concept of trust is defined here as the "perceived ability and willingness of the other party to behave in ways that consider the interests of both parties in the relationship" (Morgan & Hunt 1994). Trust exists in a relationship if parties have mutual confidence in each other's reliability and integrity (Morgan & Hunt 1994). It has been suggested that trust is the strongest governance mechanism in developing collaborative relationships (MacNeil 1980; Dodgson 1993; Doz 1996; Dyer & Singh 1998; Selnes & Sallis 2003). Commitment is the other central element in our construct of relationship assets. Following Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman (1993), we define commitment as an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship. The desire to collaborate and share information creates a climate for relationship-learning activities, which is expected to affect relationship performance positively (Selnes & Sallis 2003; Dwyer, Schurr & Oh 1987; Morgan & Hunt 1994).

The scope and tightness of actor bonds, activity links and resource ties between the two business parties reflect the relationalism of their marketing strategies. Moreover, the high level of trust and commitment between two business parties reflects the relationalism of the marketing strategies.

Finally, if the business parties perceive the relationship as a platform for organizational learning, their marketing strategies can be regarded as relational.

Method

Sample and Data Collection

The unit of analysis of this study is a business relationship between an industrial firm and its key customers. In general, we aim at describing relationalism of b-to-b firms through the adopted relationship strategies on the one hand and accrued relationship assets on the other. Thus, we approached industrial buyer-seller relationships from the viewpoint of the seller organization. This is in line with recent studies on business relationships (e.g. Bello, Chelariu & Chang 2003; Coviello et al. 2002). Other alternatives would have been to study business relationships from the customer perspective (Sheth & Shah 2003; Cannon & Perreault 1999; Morgan & Hunt 1994) or from a more unusual dyadic viewpoint incorporating the viewpoints of both the seller and the buyer (Selnes & Sallis 2003).

We prepared a four-page self-administered questionnaire. Based on earlier studies conducted by the members of the research group, the aim of the measures of the questionnaire was to reflect our conceptualization of the essential features of business relationships. All questions focused on the relationship between the focal firm or business unit and its key customers, the business environment, and the characteristics and performance of the focal firm. The directions explained that the questions should be answered with respect to the most important organizational customers of the focal firm, reflecting the relationship features and management practices typical to the firm.

The sample frame consisted of business-to-business marketing firms in the Finnish metal and electrotechnical industry, represented by the 1 375 member firms of the association of the Technology Industries of Finland, founded in 1903. In its national context, the association is the dominant industry organization, currently representing 46 % of turnover, 60 % of exports, 46 % of personnel, and 80 % of research and development among Finnish industrial firms. In relative terms, this also makes it the most dominant industry organization in the OECD countries (www.teknologiateollisuus.fi).

The questionnaire was designed to be completed by a person that is best familiar with the characteristics of the key customer relationships of a given firm/business unit. The questionnaire was sent to the managing director of the firm or the director of the business unit of a larger corporation. In our final sample, 55 % of the respondents were managing directors, 19 % business unit directors, 11 % were marketing directors, and 15% were some other directors (mainly account managers, vice presidents and sales managers). In the mail survey, we received 213 questionnaires, of which 212 were satisfactorily completed for use in the analysis. This represents a 15,3 % response rate, which can be considered satisfactory for our analytical purposes. Respondents ranged from small and medium –sized enterprises (146 firms, 69%) to business units of large industrial corporations (66 firms, 31%).

Measures

The scales used in our questionnaire were developed specifically for this research. Following Churchill's (1979) approach, the final scale items used were developed and purified from an initial pool of scale items, based on a thorough review of the literature, previous studies on interorganizational relationships conducted by the members of the research group, and the pilot study conducted among executive MBA students. The theoretical constructs of our study were measured by multi-item scales. All items were measured on five-point Likert-type scales. For each of the constructs, scale scores were computed as the means of the individual items. If necessary, reverse scoring was done.

As stated in the previous section, *relationalism* of a marketing strategy was defined in terms of the cooperativeness of marketing practices and the level of accrued relationship assets within key business relationships in a specific business-to-business marketing context. *Marketing practices* of a firm are defined in terms of the adopted interaction strategies, ranging from competitive to cooperative and command strategies, and the nature of the interaction processes of exchange, coordination and adaptations between the selling and buying organizations. Marketing practices were measured by

sixteen items: pricing done in cooperation, existence of long-term contracts, contracts done in cooperation, contracts mutually beneficial, existence of R&D cooperation, existence of manufacturing cooperation, existence of logistical cooperation, existence of marketing cooperation, extensive sharing of information, CRM system in active use of interface personnel, existence of key account managers or teams, optimized communication responsibilities, cooperative interaction, aim to deepen the relationship, company aware of the profitability of their key customers, and the development of value-added service for a key customer (Cronbach's alpha of the construct = 0.74, see Nunnally 1978; Nunnally & Bernstein 1994)

Relationship assets. Relationship assets are defined in terms of inter-actor bonds, activity links, resource ties, inter-organizational trust, commitment, and climate for relationship learning. Relationship assets were measured by ten items: use of customer relationships as a learning platform, existence of trust, existence of commitment, goal congruence, shared values and norms, congruence in expectations, the existence of good interpersonal relationships, customer satisfaction, and supplier satisfaction. (Cronbach's alpha of the construct = 0.79, see Nunnally 1978; Nunnally & Bernstein 1994)

Analysis and Results

Table 1 contains mean scores and standard deviations of marketing practices and relationship assets of the respondent companies.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of relationalism in terms of marketing practices and relationship assets

Variables operationalizing relationalism of a marketing strategy ^a	Mean	Std.deviation	n
<i>Marketing Practices</i>			
Pricing done in cooperation	2.72	1.13	210
Existence of long-term contracts	3.28	1.35	209
Contracts done in cooperation	3.12	1.04	209
Contracts mutually beneficial	3.72	0.83	211
Existence of R&D cooperation	3.84	1.05	211
Existence of manufacturing cooperation	2.70	1.39	211
Existence of logistical cooperation	3.05	1.34	210
Existence of marketing cooperation	2.49	1.29	208
Extensive sharing of information	3.36	1.06	207
CRM system in active use	1.94	1.27	204
Existence of key account managers or teams	3.89	1.29	206
Communication responsibilities optimized	3.69	1.14	206
Cooperative interaction	3.81	0.93	208
Aim to deepen the relationship	4.45	0.61	209
Company aware of the profitability of their key customers	3.99	0.92	207
Development of value-added service for a key customer	3.75	0.94	206
Marketing practices total (composite)^b	3.38	0.58	211
<i>Relationship Assets</i>			
Use of customer relationships as a learning platform	3.93	0.95	206
Existence of trust	3.99	0.81	207
Existence of commitment	4.55	0.58	207
Goal congruence	4.01	0.73	207
Shared values and norms	3.82	0.85	206
Congruence in expectations	3.68	0.80	207
Existence of good interpersonal relationships	4.36	0.60	208
Customer satisfaction	4.13	0.60	207
Supplier satisfaction	4.05	0.68	207
Relationship assets total (composite)^c	4.06	0.51	208

^a Mean scores (and standard deviations) based on a five-point scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5);

^b Cronbach's alpha = 0.74; ^c Cronbach's alpha = 0.79

On the basis of high mean scores of the two composite variables (Marketing practices total, Mean 3.38, Cronbach's alpha 0.74; Relationship assets total, Mean 4.06, Cronbach's alpha 0.79) it can be stated that the respondent companies are on the average rather relational in their marketing strategies. In 41% of the respondent companies the mean score of marketing practices composite variable exceeded 3.5. In contrast, the share of the respondents with mean score under 2.5 was very small (2.4%). When it comes to relationship assets, the respective shares were 92% (mean score of the relationship assets composite variable was over 3.5) and 1% (mean score of the relationship assets composite variable was under 2.5). On the basis of the above analysis it can be stated that

most respondent firms seem to have marketing strategies that are relational or relational/transactional hybrids. The finding that most of the studied business-to-business marketing firms in the Finnish metal and electrotechnical industry conducted predominantly relational marketing strategies was not surprising. It has been widely stated that business-to-business firms are usually more relational than firms acting on consumer markets (e.g. Håkansson 1982; Turnbull & Valla 1986; Håkansson & Snehota 1995; Coviello et al. 2002).

MANOVA and ANOVA were utilized to find out if there are differences between various types of firms in terms of marketing practices and accrued relationship assets. Firm profitability, firm growth, firm type (SME or BU of a larger corporation) and type of offering (standardized vs. customized) were used as independent variables in the analyses. When it comes to marketing practices, The MANOVA procedure showed statistically (moderately) significant differences between the groups of firm profitability ($F = 1.58, p = 0.07$) and firm type ($F=1.88, p=0.03$). Regarding the relationship assets, The MANOVA procedure showed statistically (moderately) significant differences between the groups of firm profitability ($F=2.32, p=0.01$), firm growth ($F=1.56, p=0.06$) and firm type ($F=2.33, p=0.01$).

In order to understand the underlying contributions of the variables to the significant multivariate effects, we tested all dependent variables using one-way ANOVAs (univariate tests) with the groups representing the value categories of the independent variables. The results presented in Table 2 and Table 3 reveal that differences between the groups of independent variables were not statistically significant on most variables measuring marketing practices and relationship assets (statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) and moderately significant differences ($0.05 < p < 0.1$) are bolded in the tables). Moreover, although some differences were statistically significant the actual (substantial) differences between the mean scores seem to remain rather small. From Table 2 we can see, for example, that statistically significant differences exist between the unprofitable and profitable firms with respect to the relationship assets (a composite variable, $F=4.88, p=0.03$). However, the substantial difference is rather small since the mean score of the relationship assets composite was 3.96 for the unprofitable firms and 4.12 for the profitable ones. However, the slight difference can be stated to prevail between the firm profitability and the accrued relationship assets.

On the basis of our analysis of the marketing practices and accrued relationship assets of the firms in the Finnish metal and electrotechnical industry, a general conclusion can be made that differences between various types of firms were not substantially significant. In other words, no particularly strong and clear differences were found in marketing practices and relationship assets between the groups of the employed independent variables. Although relationalism of the marketing strategy in terms of marketing practices/relationship assets and firm profitability seem to have a weak connection, our study cannot confirm the common belief that companies should strive towards the creation of close and bonded relationships with their key customers in order to be more profitable than their competitors. Rather, it seems to be so that in the business-to-business context where the markets are network-like, close relationships to key customers can be regarded more as a necessary condition to survive than a sufficient condition to succeed. However, further studies are undoubtedly needed in order to shed light on the many features and consequences of relationalism as a marketing strategy in business-to-business markets.

Table 2 ANOVAs for differences between unprofitable and profitable firms as well as between firms with negative, modest and positive growth

Dependent variables	Group means ^a			Group means ^a				
	operationalizing relationalism of a marketing strategy	Unprofitable firms (n = 81)	Profitable firms (n = 108)	F-ratio/ p-value	Firms with negative growth (n=57)	Firms with zero or modest growth (n=28)	Firms with strong growth (n=66)	F-ratio/ p-value
Pricing done in cooperation		2.69 (1.08)	2.71 (1.16)	0.02 / 0.89	2.51 (1.01)	2.79 (1.07)	2.73 (1.17)	0.81 / 0.44
Existence of long-term contracts		3.12 (1.32)	3.39 (1.35)	1.82 / 0.18	3.04 (1.44)	3.57 (1.17)	3.27 (1.39)	1.47 / 0.23
Contracts done in cooperation		3.15 (1.00)	3.06 (1.10)	0.29 / 0.59	3.19 (1.04)	3.18 (0.98)	2.97 (1.14)	0.77 / 0.47
Contracts mutually beneficial		3.59 (0.79)	3.85 (0.80)	4.97 / 0.03	3.74 (0.81)	3.71 (0.71)	3.88 (0.76)	0.71 / 0.49
Existence of R&D cooperation		3.90 (1.01)	3.93 (1.00)	0.03 / 0.87	3.91 (0.95)	3.96 (0.96)	3.98 (1.05)	0.08 / 0.92
Existence of manufacturing cooperation		2.85 (1.41)	2.63 (1.43)	1.14 / 0.29	2.44 (1.40)	2.54 (1.35)	2.80 (1.45)	1.07 / 0.34
Existence of logistical cooperation		3.05 (1.41)	3.09 (1.32)	0.05 / 0.83	2.95 (1.33)	2.86 (1.38)	3.15 (1.35)	0.60 / 0.55
Existence of marketing cooperation		2.52 (1.27)	2.44 (1.33)	0.19 / 0.67	2.30 (1.32)	2.57 (1.35)	2.53 (1.32)	0.61 / 0.54
Extensive sharing of information		3.17 (1.17)	3.52 (0.95)	5.01 / 0.03	3.28 (1.07)	3.29 (1.08)	3.52 (1.01)	0.92 / 0.40
CRM system in active use		1.88 (1.29)	2.02 (1.28)	0.57 / 0.45	1.79 (1.10)	2.00 (1.36)	1.88 (1.26)	0.28 / 0.75
Existence of key account managers or teams		3.94 (1.27)	3.85 (1.34)	0.20 / 0.65	3.63 (1.37)	4.04 (1.26)	4.02 (1.26)	1.59 / 0.21
Communication responsibilities optimized		3.59 (1.23)	3.73 (1.01)	0.68 / 0.41	3.56 (1.20)	3.79 (0.88)	3.88 (1.05)	1.36 / 0.26
Cooperative interaction atmosphere		3.85 (0.84)	3.80 (0.98)	0.17 / 0.68	3.77 (0.93)	3.68 (0.82)	3.85 (1.00)	0.34 / 0.72
Aim to deepen the relationship		4.49 (0.64)	4.48 (0.58)	0.02 / 0.89	4.35 (0.55)	4.54 (0.58)	4.55 (0.61)	1.92 / 0.15
Company aware of the profitability of their key customers		3.88 (0.98)	4.09 (0.90)	2.47 / 0.12	3.89 (1.01)	3.93 (0.86)	4.18 (0.78)	1.80 / 0.17
Development of value-added service for a key customer		3.74 (1.06)	3.79 (0.85)	0.11 / 0.74	3.58 (0.91)	3.86 (0.89)	3.86 (0.82)	1.89 / 0.16
Marketing practices total (composite) ^b		3.31 (0.56)	3.44 (0.55)	2.76 / 0.09	3.30 (0.50)	3.46 (0.51)	3.39 (0.55)	1.07 / 0.35
		Unprofitable firms (n = 83)	Profitable firms (n = 122)		Firms with negative growth (n=62)	Firms with zero or modest growth (n=30)	Firms with strong growth (n=71)	
Use of customer relationships as a learning platform		3.84 (1.08)	3.98 (0.84)	1.08 / 0.30	3.79 (1.01)	3.93 (0.83)	4.03 (0.89)	1.01 / 0.34
Existence of trust		3.83 (0.96)	4.10 (0.69)	5.40 / 0.02	4.03 (0.83)	4.20 (0.66)	3.96 (0.82)	0.98 / 0.38
Existence of commitment		4.48 (0.63)	4.41 (0.54)	2.30 / 0.13	4.56 (0.59)	4.47 (0.51)	4.62 (0.49)	0.88 / 3.42
Goal congruence		3.98 (0.78)	4.05 (0.70)	0.49 / 0.48	3.89 (0.79)	4.20 (0.48)	4.04 (0.73)	2.04 / 0.13
Shared values and norms		3.72 (0.83)	3.89 (0.85)	2.02 / 0.16	3.66 (0.83)	3.87 (0.86)	3.92 (0.77)	1.72 / 0.18
Congruence in expectations		3.51 (0.90)	3.80 (0.72)	6.51 / 0.01	3.60 (0.80)	3.63 (0.81)	3.80 (0.75)	1.26 / 0.29
Existence of good interpersonal relationships		4.36 (0.64)	4.37 (0.58)	0.01 / 0.93	4.26 (0.57)	4.47 (0.51)	4.42 (0.55)	2.05 / 0.13
Customer satisfaction		3.95 (0.70)	4.24 (0.50)	11.72 / 0.00	4.05 (0.53)	4.20 (0.61)	4.15 (0.65)	0.84 / 0.44
Supplier satisfaction		3.86 (0.78)	4.18 (0.56)	11.99 / 0.00	3.90 (0.72)	3.97 (0.62)	4.18 (0.68)	2.96 / 0.06
Relationship assets (composite) ^c		3.96 (0.61)	4.12 (0.42)	4.88 / 0.03	4.02 (0.56)	4.10 (0.48)	4.10 (0.48)	0.50 / 0.61

^a Mean scores (and standard deviations) based on a five-point scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5); ^b Cronbach's alpha = 0.74; ^c Cronbach's alpha = 0.79

Table 3 ANOVAs for differences between SMEs and BUs of large corporations as well as between firms offering standard and customized products

Dependent variables operationalizing relationalism of a marketing strategy	Group means ^a		<i>F</i> -ratio/ <i>p</i> -value	Group means ^a		<i>F</i> -ratio/ <i>p</i> -value
	SMEs (n = 124)	BUs of large industrial corporations (n = 60)		Firms offering standard products (n=66)	Firms offering customized products (n=117)	
Pricing done in cooperation	2.69 (1.16)	2.79 (1.04)	0.10 / 0.74	2.71 (1.23)	2.73 (1.08)	0.07 / 0.93
Existence of long-term contracts	3.27 (1.33)	3.22 (1.35)	0.06 / 0.82	3.55 (1.32)	3.14 (1.35)	3.96 / 0.05
Contracts done in cooperation	3.05 (1.09)	3.27 (0.97)	1.74 / 0.19	3.12 (1.05)	3.14 (1.06)	0.01 / 0.92
Contracts mutually beneficial	3.73 (0.83)	3.83 (0.69)	0.75 / 0.39	3.89 (0.56)	3.72 (0.86)	2.23 / 0.14
Existence of R&D cooperation	3.87 (1.06)	3.98 (0.85)	0.51 / 0.48	3.88 (0.97)	3.97 (0.99)	0.40 / 0.53
Existence of manufacturing cooperation	2.84 (1.42)	2.50 (1.33)	2.39 / 0.12	2.65 (1.40)	2.78 (1.44)	0.33 / 0.57
Existence of logistical cooperation	3.01 (1.38)	3.12 (1.30)	0.26 / 0.61	3.05 (1.35)	3.08 (1.37)	0.02 / 0.88
Existence of marketing cooperation	2.40 (1.26)	2.58 (1.39)	0.84 / 0.36	2.80 (1.36)	2.32 (1.26)	5.96 / 0.02
Extensive sharing of information	3.36 (1.06)	3.42 (1.05)	0.11 / 0.75	3.52 (0.97)	3.32 (1.08)	1.41 / 0.24
CRM system in active use	1.80 (1.26)	2.25 (1.26)	5.19 / 0.02	1.89 (1.23)	2.01 (1.33)	0.33 / 0.57
Existence of key account managers or teams	3.81 (1.33)	4.05 (1.20)	1.35 / 0.25	3.92 (1.33)	3.88 (1.28)	0.05 / 0.83
Communication responsibilities optimized	3.65 (1.19)	3.73 (1.10)	0.23 / 0.63	3.76 (0.99)	3.68 (1.20)	0.23 / 0.64
Cooperative interaction	3.78 (0.94)	3.90 (0.88)	0.66 / 0.42	3.86 (0.86)	3.83 (0.94)	0.06 / 0.81
Aim to deepen the relationship	4.43 (0.64)	4.57 (0.53)	2.13 / 0.15	4.53 (0.59)	4.49 (0.57)	0.24 / 0.63
Company aware of the profitability of their key customers	4.17 (0.75)	3.63 (1.16)	14.16 / 0.00	3.88 (1.07)	4.08 (0.86)	1.86 / 0.18
Development of value-added service for a key customer	3.72 (0.94)	3.87 (0.91)	1.03 / 0.31	3.79 (0.85)	3.79 (0.97)	0.00 / 0.99
Marketing practices total (composite) ^b	3.38 (0.58)	3.42 (0.50)	0.19 / 0.66	3.45 (0.53)	3.38 (0.54)	0.91 / 0.34
	SMEs (n=137)	BUs of large industrial corporations (n = 62)		Firms offering standard products (n=71)	Firms offering customized products (n=127)	
Use of customer relationships as a learning platform	3.78 (1.02)	4.21 (0.73)	8.90 / 0.00	3.94 (0.92)	3.95 (0.93)	0.00 / 0.95
Existence of trust	3.98 (0.85)	4.00 (0.77)	0.03 / 0.86	4.07 (0.82)	3.97 (0.83)	0.70 / 0.40
Existence of commitment	4.52 (0.62)	4.65 (0.48)	2.04 / 0.16	4.56 (0.58)	4.58 (0.50)	0.06 / 0.81
Goal congruence	4.04 (0.79)	3.98 (0.61)	0.22 / 0.64	4.06 (0.70)	4.03 (0.71)	0.06 / 0.81
Shared values and norms	3.82 (0.92)	3.84 (0.68)	0.01 / 0.92	3.90 (0.85)	3.83 (0.82)	0.37 / 0.54
Congruence in expectations	3.72 (0.85)	3.63 (0.71)	0.49 / 0.49	3.94 (0.67)	3.59 (0.80)	9.89 / 0.00
Existence of good interpersonal relationships	4.42 (0.58)	4.26 (0.65)	2.95 / 0.09	4.41 (0.58)	4.37 (0.59)	0.20 / 0.66
Customer satisfaction	4.14 (0.64)	4.10 (0.50)	0.21 / 0.65	4.13 (0.48)	4.15 (0.63)	0.07 / 0.79
Supplier satisfaction	4.08 (0.72)	3.98 (0.61)	0.84 / 0.36	4.08 (0.58)	4.05 (0.73)	0.14 / 0.71
Relationship assets (composite) ^c	4.03 (0.57)	4.13 (0.38)	1.59 / 0.21	4.17 (0.51)	4.03 (0.47)	3.68 / 0.06

^a Mean scores based on a five-point scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5); ^b Cronbach's alpha = 0.74; ^c Cronbach's alpha = 0.79

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