

THE PROCEEDING OF A PROCESS – A TRIADIC APPROACH

Work-in-progress

Special track: Time and process in business network research

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Abstract

Purpose and literature addressed: The purpose of this paper is to model the proceeding of adaptation processes in business triads. The specific question addressed is: *how do adaptations spread in business triads to engage all the three actors?* The empirical context is business travel management, and the triads consist of an industrial buyer, its travel agency and service supplier partners (two airlines companies and a hotel chain). The theoretical framework relies on the network approach by the IMP Group (Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995) and studies of network change (Halinen, Salmi and Havila, 1999; Havila and Salmi, 2000). Sociological theories (Caplow, 1956, 1969; Simmel in Wolff, 1950) are used to understand how actors in a triad behave.

Method: Systematic combining approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002), retrospective case studies and in-depth interviews with actual co-operating partners are used to create the framework. The study has a *triadic approach*, which provides *multiple perspectives* to specific adaptations. In each triad, adaptations are analyzed (1) from all the three actors' perspective, (2) from both ends of the dyads, and (3) in the context of a specific triad.

Major findings: Adaptations can spread in three different ways, based on their initiation. *Connected adaptations* are initiated by any one of the three firms, and they are responded by the other two, either in co-operation, or one by one. *Derived adaptations* refer to adaptations where the initiator is one of the three dyads. *Agreed adaptations* are planned and implemented in co-operation with all three firms.

Contribution: The study has important implications to process research within connected relationships. It contributes to relationship dynamism research by investigates ongoing service supply and sourcing processes. A triadic approach is applied, and multiple perspectives to adaptation processes in specific relationships are provided.

Keywords: Triadic approach, multiple perspectives, adaptation, spread, connectedness.

INTRODUCTION

Investigating a phenomenon from multiple perspectives reduces the narrow-minded interpretation of cases. Theoretical support for this can be found for example in customer satisfaction literature, where it is necessary to take into account both the supplier's and customer's expectations of the service (e.g. Grönroos, 2008; Zeithaml et al., 1990). In human resource research, multi-source feedback techniques is applied to enhance the ability of the individual, group or firm to observe and correct the shortages that may arise, for example in goal setting (London and Smither, 1995). When studying market orientation, the appropriate level is the level that the customer thinks it should be (Steinman, Despandé and Farley, 2000). Thus, besides the firm's perception, also the customer's perception is needed.

Dyadic business relationships are generally investigated from both sides. Also a triad is a common relationship setting, and the dyadic approach can be extended to a triadic one (Havila, Johansson and Thilenius, 2004; Phillips, Liu and Costello, 1998). A triadic approach is especially relevant in relationships where an intermediary is involved, and all the three actors have direct connection with each other (Madhavan, Gnyawali and He, 2004; Havila et al., 2004). In studies of interconnectedness between relationships, it is sufficient to analyze triads, because a network can be deconstructed into triads for analytic purposes (Ritter, 2000). Triad as an analytical tool may help to understand the dynamics of power, loyalty, commitment (Andersson Cederholm and Gyimóthy 2005), and trust (Svensson, 2004), and specifically in service relationships.

There are differences in dyads, triads, and in larger groups that may have an impact on how processes, such as adaptation processes, proceed. In triads, members normally have a chance to interact directly with each other (Caplow, 1956), meanwhile in larger groups, interaction must be mediated through formal arrangements. In a dyad, each participant is directly liable for any collective action, because he/she deals with only one other individual. Neither of the two can deny responsibility by shifting it to the group, nor blame the group for his/her actions. In all other groups, duties and responsibilities can be delegated. Furthermore, the triad can enforce its will upon one member through a coalition formation between the two others. (Coser, 1977; Caplow, 1968; Simmel in Wolff, 1950), and a triad is never stable in the way that there would be a perfect balance between all the three dyads (Havila, 1996; Phillips Carson, Carson, Knouse and Roe, 1997; Gutek, Groth and Bennett, 2002). Larger groups, in their turn, tend to be more stable because of the greater diversity of relationships that can form in them (Caplow, 1956). In a triad, the third actor may have different roles. He/she may keep the triad together by softening the conflicts between the other two, or turn to his own advantage a disagreement between the other two. Furthermore, he/she may intentionally create conflicts between the other two in order to attain a dominant position or other gains. (Simmel in Wolff, 1950)

Adaptation is generally seen as a dyadic phenomenon, and triadic approach in business research is scarce. Furthermore, only few business studies with three actors have an explicitly triadic approach (e.g. Havila, 1996; Trimarchi; 2001; Havila et al., 2004), and it remains often unclear what is exactly meant by a triadic approach. In this study, each of the three dyadic relationships is investigated in the context of the other two dyads to which it is connected, and from both ends, providing thus multiple perspectives to specific adaptations. *The purpose is to model the spread of adaptations in business triads.* The specific question addressed is: *how do adaptations spread*

in business triads to engage all the three actors? The triads exist at the firm level, and it consists of three independent actors (firms) that are connected to each other, either directly or indirectly, for business purposes. By applying the systematic combining approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002), an analytical framework is created. The theoretical background relies on the network approach by the IMP Group (Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995), and the studies of network change (Halinen & al., 1999; Havila and Salmi, 2000). Empirical context entails case studies in business travel management.

The paper is arranged in the following way. Section two discusses the theoretical framework. Section three explains the research methods and analysis procedures. Empirical findings will be presented in the section four. Finally, section five concludes the study, and provides suggestions for further research.

THE PROCEEDING OF ADAPTATIONS IN CONNECTED RELATIONSHIPS

A group of three actors is argued to be the smallest conceivable unit of analysis in which it is possible to study connections between relationships (cf. Easton and Henriques in Havila, 1996; Ritter, 2000). The current study has its focus on a business triad, and on its three dyadic relationships that are connected to each other, either directly or indirectly, via a third actor. Thus, in the same relationship setting, there may be situations where the three actors are directly connected, and situations where they are indirectly connected. In other words, two actors may cope with a situation without, or with, the immediate help of the third actor. In the business context, this may concern, for example, contract negotiations. The buyer may agree with the supplier to buy services via an intermediary. Both the buyer and the supplier, or one of them, discusses the terms of service delivery with the intermediary. However, sometimes it may be simpler to arrange a meeting where all three are present, so as to discuss the terms on the spot.

In a triad with *indirect connections*, each of the three actors may function as an intermediary between the other two (Havila, 1996). In addition to the direct relationship between actors A and B, there is a relationship between them that is derived from their common relationship to actor C (Granovetter, 1973). Consequently, the relationship between actors A and C, and the relationship between actors C and B, have an impact on the relationship between actors A and B. A triad with *direct connections* functions as one relationship where social interaction is one entity. Then, an increase in social interaction between, for example, an intermediary and customer cause a decrease in social interaction between supplier and customer, and vice versa (Havila et al., 2004). There may also be differences in the strength of the connections. Granovetter (1973: 1363) argues that triads are common if the relationships between actors A and B, and A and C are strong relationships. Then it is to be expected that there is also either a strong, or a weak connection between the actors B and C.

Whether the connections between the actors are direct or indirect, strong or weak, a triadic relationship setting may be investigated from two perspectives. The researcher may focus on *the actors*, or on *the relationships and their connections*. In business network studies, the focus of is usually not on the triad as such, i.e. as a phenomenon, which could be compared to a group, but on the specific connections between the three parties or the relationships in the channel or in the network. In the current study, the focus is on the connections between dyad actors in specific triads. It covers both direct and indirect connections between the actors in different situations.

Prior research on adaptation proves that most business relationships are based on a process of matching between the operations of *two* companies (e.g. Canning and Hanmer-Lloyd, 2001; Canning and Hanmer-Lloyd, 2002; Brennan, Turnbull and Wilson, 2003; Canning and Brennan, 2004; Schmidt, Tyler and Brennan, 2007). Thus, it is regarded as a *dyadic phenomenon*. However, when a dyadic perspective is applied, the connectedness of the relationships is neglected. A given relationship does not only affect itself and the two actors involved, but it may also have an effect on other relationships (Walter and Ritter, 2003). Furthermore, previous research focusing on adaptation is mainly conducted in the manufacturing sector and research on adaptation in the context of “pure” service industries is limited (Brennan et. al., 2003). Adaptation in the context of services is important, because services and service processes are developed in co-operation between the buyers and suppliers (e.g. Grönroos, 2000: 46).

Adaptation is closely related to change. Changes in business networks have been studied by Halinen et al. (1999), and Havila and Salmi (2000). They paid particular emphasis to the impact a change in a dyad may have on other connected relationships, and suggest that part of a change always remains within a business relationship dyad, while some part of a change may also affect other relationships and actors in the network. They call the former change mechanism confined change and the latter one connected change.

Confined change implies a seemingly stable situation in a network. It remains within a dyad without affecting the other actors in the network. *Connected change* in a network is “*a change in one relationship that is received and acted upon by other actors in the network*” (Halinen et al., 1999: 782). Halinen et al. (1999), emphasize the importance of dyadic relationships both as receivers and as transmitters of change. Actors are able to reproduce, adapt, absorb or transmit the change to other relationships (Easton and Lundgren, 1992). In the same way, adaptations may be received and responded to by the other actors in a triad. Adaptations may extend from one actor to the other actors or from one dyad to the other connected relationships. (Holma, 2009)

According to Håkansson and Snehota (1995), adaptations occur when *firms adjust their actors, resources and activities* to those of the counterparts. By applying the systematic combining approach, this study models *the ways of how these adjustments extend to incorporate the triadic relationship setting*. Three different ways, based on who is, or who the initiators of the adaptations are, are discovered: connected, derived, and agreed adaptations (cf. Holma, 2009), as exemplified in the table one, and explained below.

In **connected adaptation**, one of the actors functions as an initiator. Connected adaptations, on their turn may spread in three different ways. First, the initiator may be actor A, requiring adaptations from actors B and C. Actor B is responding, and actor C is adapting to the adaptations made by actors A and B. Second, adaptation may be initiated by actor A, and actors B and C make adaptations in co-operation. Third, actor A may be the initiator, and actors B and C react in turn. **Derived adaptation** refers to a process where adaptation is initiated in one of the dyads, and responded to and acted upon by the third actor. **Agreed adaptation** is planned and implemented in co-operation with all three actors. The triad functions then like a group (cf. Havila, 1996).

Table 1 Analysis framework.

<i>Spread of adaptation</i>	<i>Initiator</i>	<i>Respons 1</i>	<i>Respons 2</i>
Connected	Actor A	→ Actor B	→ Actor C
	Actor A	→ Actor B + C	
	Actor A	→ Actor B → Actor C	← Actor C ← Actor B
Derived	Actor A + B	→ Actor C	
Agreed	→ Actor A + B + C		

RESEARCH METHOD AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The current case study is retrospective processual case study, covering six years' co-operation between an industrial enterprise, and its travel agency and supplier partners. The theory development is based on an abductive research, and characterized by systematic combining (Dubois and Gadde, 2002), where the theoretical and empirical fieldwork and case analysis advance simultaneously. The approach is more open-ended than for example the case study approach by Yin (2002). Case-based research is recommended when the aim is to understand the process by which specific relationships develop over time (Håkansson, 1982; Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Halinen and Törnroos, 2005). Case studies give a full and rich description of a network of relationships between a multitude of events and factors (Gummesson, 2001; Halinen and Törnroos, 2005; Easton, 2010).

Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with actual co-operating partners from each of the case firms. Industry reports, trade magazines, and scientific research on travel industry were used for industry specific information. The individual actors are from different organizational levels in the co-operating firms (see table 2). The industrial enterprise is represented by the travel manager and a business traveler. The travel manager is the key informant who handpicked the other informants. Two travel agencies (1 and 2) are involved in the study. The general manager and the district manager represent the travel agency 1, and the Nordic manager and the operation manager the travel agency 2. The clerk worked for the travel agency 1, and moved to the travel agency 2 along with the new contract. Thus, she represents both the agencies, and comments for them both. The airline (A and B) informants, the account manager and the sales director, and the hotel chain informant, the sales manager, are the travel manager's contact persons with whom the co-operation is arranged.

Table 2 The informants.

Industrial enterprise	Travel agency 1	Travel agency 2	Airline A	Airline B	Hotel chain
Travel manager	General manager	Nordic manager	Account manager	Sales director	Sales manager
Business traveler	District manager	Operation manager			
	Clerk				

To capture the frame of reference, and to structure the analysis, the critical interview technique based on Flanagan (1954) and developed by Chell (2004) was utilized. The technique makes it possible to investigate important events and processes, and their outcomes in terms of perceived effects. The aim is to understand the incidents from an individual’s perspective, and take into account cognitive, affective and behavioral elements. This technique, unlike unstructured interview, enables to probe properly, by asking, for example, what happened next, why it happened, how it happened, and what the consequences were (Chell 2004).

Prior research with three actors usually study separate dyads (e.g. Phillips Carson et al., 1997; Gutek et al., 2002). In the current study, embedded single case design (cf. Perry, 2001; Grünbaum, 2007) was applied, i.e. several units of analysis in one case were examined. Figure 1 illustrates the research setting with six business triads, in which 11 dyads (numbers 1-11) are embedded. All the actors, in the firm level, and in the individual level are directly connected to the industrial enterprise’s travel management process, and they were actual co-operating partners during the interview process.

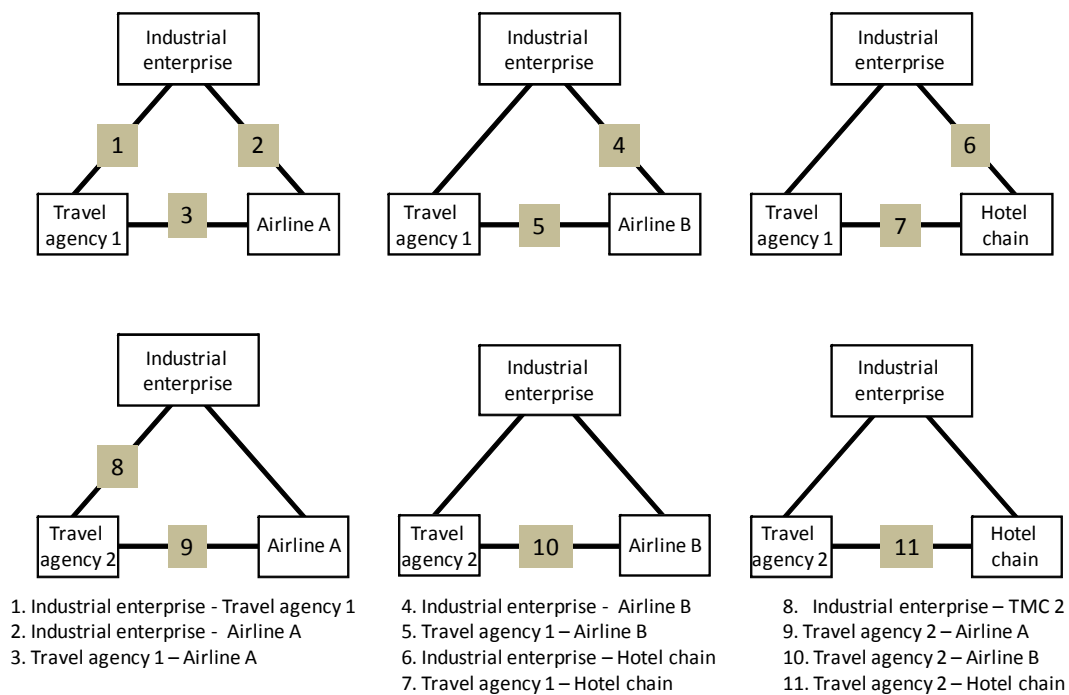


Figure 1 The units of analysis.

Triadic approach is applied, i.e. *each of the three dyads is investigated in the context of the other two dyadic relationships to which it is connected, and from both ends*. The triadic approach is inspired by *the micronet approach* suggested by Halinen and Törnroos (1998). However, the current perspective is limited to examine the relationships from “inside” the triad. The perspective is similar to “a net within a network” perspective (Halinen, lecture 14.6.2007). The actor-network perspective (Halinen and Törnroos, 1998), where a business network is viewed from a certain actor’s viewpoint, is usually applied in network studies. Also dyad-network perspective (ibid.), which observes the core dyad as a part of a wider industrial network, is common.

The analysis went on throughout the interview process (cf. Cepeda and Martin 2005). The interviews were transcribed and the data were organized into categories of themes with the help of NVivo software package. Within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Yin, 2002) were applied. Within case analysis provided a description for each side of the relationship. Each case was analyzed in a three-stage interactive process as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The data were cross-case analyzed to compare the embedded cases.

The spread of adaptations in business travel management – case study findings



Corporate travel management provides the empirical setting for the research. Travel management is originally the responsibility of the corporate travel management function. However, it relies on the interactive relationships between the core actors, of which the most important are the suppliers and the intermediaries. (Douglas and Lubbe, 2006) The current research focuses on *adaptations between firms*, but the impact of different interorganizational interaction levels cannot be excluded. *In the buyer organization*, travel management consists of a large variety of items that involve significant administrative efforts. It engages several internal departments and units, and exploits the partners’ resources. The two main levels this study focuses on, are the *managerial level*, where the contracts are negotiated, and the *operational level*, which implies the practical travel arrangements.

During the investigated period, adaptations spread differently in different situations. Some examples are provided in the following. Direct quotations are used to highlight the connection between the interpretations and the case studies.

Connected adaptations



The industrial enterprise had an extensive cost saving campaign due to internationalization, and thereby growing travel budgets. Business travel was downgraded to economy class, and the airline seats were reallocated to face the new needs. Co-operation was then arranged with the travel agency 1, and sales commissions were percentage based. Thus, both airlines and the travel agency faced reducing yields. For the travel agency, adaptations also implied human resources, because booking economy tickets is more time consuming. Adaptations were connected, i.e. they were initiated by the industrial enterprise, and responded to by the airlines, and by the travel agency, one by one, as exemplified in the table 3.

Table 3 Connected adaptations initiated by the industrial enterprise.

Motivation to adaptations	Industrial enterprise’s growing travel costs		
The spread of adaptations	Industrial enterprise 	Airlines	 Travel agency 1
The focus of adaptations	Downgrading travel from business to economic class	Seat reallocation	Human resources, learning
Excerpts	“...they [industrial enterprise] were the ones to make the decision that we wouldn’t travel business class anymore.” (Travel agency 2, Nordic manager)	“When business travel was downgraded from business class to economy class, our yield went down, of course.” (Airline A, account manager).	“...the corporate buyer wanted to have the seat at the cheapest possible price...” (Travel agency 2, Nordic manager)


In the beginning of the 2000s, airlines gradually removed their sales commissions. Travel agencies were forced to change their earning logics (see table 4). Their role changed radically, instead of “ticket dealers”, they became their client’s partners. This had naturally an impact on the industrial enterprise. To replace the missed commissions, travel agencies started to charge service fees from their clients. Contracts with new terms were negotiated.

Table 4 Connected adaptations initiated by the airlines.

Motivation to adaptations	Zero commissions		
The spread of adaptations	Airlines		Travel agencies
			 Industrial enterprise
The focus of adaptations	Distribution costs		Earning logics
			Terms of contracts and payments
Excerpts	“We [airlines] were not very popular when we removed the commissions to travel agencies. Many of them thought it was the end for them.” (Airline A, account manager)		“Earlier, we were the service suppliers’ functional supply chain. Of course, that’s what we still are, but now when we do not get commissions, we have become the buyer organisation’s partner. (Former travel agency, general manager)
			“If you call yourself a business travel agency, you have to have something to give, something that the buyer is willing to pay for.” (Travel manager)

Another possibility for the suppliers to save in distribution costs would have been to bypass travel agencies with the help of technology (see table 5). The time was ripe for internet bookings, and suppliers offered the industrial enterprise the opportunities to make travel arrangements without an intermediary. However, the travel manager was not willing to start “surfing the internet”, but wanted to continue co-operation with the travel agencies. New ways to utilise booking technology were discovered in co-operation with the travel agencies.

Table 5 Connected adaptations initiated by the airlines.

Motivation to adaptations	Internet bookings	
The spread of adaptations	Airlines	 Industrial enterprise + Travel agencies
The focus of adaptations	Distribution costs	Taking advantage of booking technology
Excerpts	“...service suppliers saw a lot of possibilities to bypass delivery channels.” (Airline B, director)	“...and then we got these internet rates, and the value of the travel agency returned to the same level it was in the 1980s when they were able to find all the best rates for their client.” (Travel manager)
		“..so it is actually that we provide them [corporate clients] with the tools that our agency is sitting with, but with a user-friendlier interface. There are of course some limitations, there are some things you cannot do yourself, which is regulated by law. But other things you can do precisely as if you are a real agent, but with easier commands.” (Travel agency 2, Nordic manager)

Derived adaptations

The complicated rate structure and the many restrictions in the flight tickets encouraged the industrial enterprise and travel agencies to form coalitions against the airlines to make them change their pricing (see table 6). Airlines assumed that business travelers place high value on ticket flexibility and low value on cost. Thus high cost, fully flexible tickets were aimed at this market. The airlines, for example, had a revenue management system, which allowed them to sell the same seat for 15 to 20 different prices, depending on which market segment the traveler belonged to: business traveler, leisure traveler, price-sensitive, not price-sensitive, etc. Business travelers were kept away from the low fares by placing a requirement to stay over Saturday nights (Sunday rule) and to buy the ticket two weeks in advance (see also Mason and Gray, 1999). Furthermore, the tickets were return tickets, non-refundable, and non-changeable. The travel manager noticed that there was no use to negotiate contracts as long as everyday leisure travelers got better rates. The travel agencies, created ways of how to use the tickets directed to leisure travelers, named “crosswise tickets”. Gradually, airlines renewed their pricing, not only to adapt to the industrial enterprise’s requirements, but also to a number of other clients’ collective requirements.

Table 6 Derived adaptations.

Motivation to adaptations	Complicated rate structure	
The spread of adaptations	Industrial enterprise and travel agencies	Airlines
The focus of adaptations	Delivering tickets directed to leisure travelers.	Gradually changing the pricing structure.
Excerpts	<p>“And then the creative people found out that you could then use two tickets instead, one for the outbound and one for the homebound [crosswise tickets], and basically buy two journeys and in that way saving money. (Travel agency 2, Nordic manager)</p> <p>“We can use the crosswise tickets quite efficiently. However, quite often the other half of the ticket ends up in the dustbin because you were not able to plan, and there was the wrong date on the ticket.” (Traveller)</p>	<p>“We see a tendency now that once more the airlines are creating fare types where you get rid of this system [crosswise tickets]. If you are away for only two days, for instance, you can do that in economy class in the same week and on one ticket only.” (Travel agency 2, Nordic manager)</p>

Agreed adaptations

During the investigated period, interfirm co-operation increased, and sometimes adaptations were agreed between the three actors. These adaptations concerned mainly the terms of the delivery, and technological adaptations in the travel management process (see table 7). There were some technical obstacles, and the solutions to the common problems were discussed together.

Table 7 Agreed adaptations.

Motivation to adaptations	To make the travel management process more efficient
The spread of adaptations	Agreed between the industrial enterprise, travel agencies, suppliers
The focus of adaptations	Service process development, technological adaptations
Excerpts	<p>“...we quite often gather together, the travel agency account manager, the travel manager, and me. We are not directly negotiating fares, but we discuss how the co-operation could be realized regarding some specific issues.” (Airline A, account manager).</p> <p>“Our role as a generator of the different systems is very important in order to make it easier for the client company’s budgeting and also in order to make the travel agency’s work easier.” (Airline A, account manager)</p> <p>“...the ideal situation would be if, all of us would be in the same database...creating standards instead of developing our own solutions.” (Travel manager)</p> <p>“Very few of our corporate clients use our internet reservation system because those of the intermediaries [travel agencies and booking agents] are better and quicker...” (Sales manager, hotel chain)</p>

Conclusions, limitations and avenues for further research

In this study, triadic approach to adaptation processes in business triads was applied, i.e. each of the three dyadic relationships was investigated in the context of the other two dyads, and from both ends. The purpose was to model how adaptations spread in business triads. Analytical framework was created with the help of the network approach by the IMP Group (Håkansson, 1982; Håkansson and Snehota, 1995), business network change studies (Halinen et al., 1999), and case studies in business travel management. The spread of adaptation was exemplified with the triads consisting of an industrial enterprise, its travel agency and supplier partners.

Based on who initiates adaptations, three different ways of how they spread were discovered. The actors in a specific triad may have direct and indirect connection with each other, depending on the nature of the adaptation. Connected adaptations are initiated by one of the firms; derived adaptations are initiated by a dyad, and agreed adaptations are planned in co-operation with all three firms. The initiators in the current study were either the service suppliers, or the industrial enterprise. The travel agencies did not directly initiate adaptations, but they were active participants in all the adaptation processes, and creative in finding new solutions specifically for their client’s needs.

Previous studies of how actors in a specific business triad adapt to each other are scarce. The main findings regarding this specific relationship setting contribute the discussion of the triadic approach itself. The triadic approach to adaptation provides multiple perspectives to specific adaptations. The approach can be used to study, besides adaptation, other relationship specific features in triads (cf. Holma, 2010). Furthermore, interesting variations in the connections between the actors were discovered. During the relationships’ lifetimes, in the same triads, the

actors can have both direct and indirect connections. Furthermore, a coalition formation (cf. Caplow, 1968) was discovered, which reflects the triads' unstable nature (cf. Havila, 1996; Gutek et al., 2002)

The current study provides one example of the use of the triadic approach, and has naturally limitations. First, this study is conducted in the business travel industry. This industry serves as an example of a service industry with intangible and perishable services. Furthermore, the travel management function presents an example of an activity chain where the adaptations occur. This activity chain is investigated from the buyer's perspective. Second, the core triads consist of an industrial enterprise, its service supplier, and business travel agency partners. These actors have their own roles, and this relationship constellation represents one type of a triadic relationship setting. In another context, adaptations may have different features. However, the findings of this study may be applied to similar three-party relationships with a buyer, supplier, and intermediary.

In-depth interviews were the main source of information. Brennan et al. (2003) suggest co-interview techniques where the informants are interviewed simultaneously. This approach would create the opportunity to address directly the possible conflicting views that the exchange partners may hold about the nature of adaptations in specific relationships. This approach, however, causes difficulties in practical details, because it is impossible to find a time that would suit the informants. Furthermore, the informants express themselves more freely when the counterparts are not present, and the conflicting views would probably not have been solved by discussing them openly.

This study stimulates a number of avenues for further research. In triadic business relationships, power plays a remarkable role. Adaptations may be coerced by coalition formations, as in the current study. When studying adaptations in triadic relationship settings, power distribution, and its impact on the spread of adaptation deserves further research. Furthermore, the changing role of the intermediary in between the industrial buyer and service suppliers would be an interesting research topic. Adaptations were in this study investigated in the firm level. However, it is the individual employees that suggest, require, plan and implement the adaptations. Thus, focusing on the employees would allow a more nuanced analysis of adaptation processes.

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