

PERFORMANCE MEASURES ALONG THE RELATIONAL CONTINUUM IN A BILATERAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

New organisational forms, including strategic partnerships and networks, are replacing simple market-based transactions and traditional, bureaucratic, hierarchical organisations (Webster, 1992). The shift in the way marketing is being organised is accompanied by both environmental and structural changes (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Palmer, 2000; Investor Digest, 2001). This new emerging paradigm of thought argues that it is more important to focus on the development and management of relationships than on discrete transactions (Ford, 1980; IMP Group, 1982; Webster, 1992; Grönroos, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Berry, 1995).

These business-to-business buyer-seller trading interactions have been revealed to take place under a variety of governance structures (Bradach and Eccles, 1989; Heide, 1994), with each one undergoing different stages of development (Dwyer et al., 1987). Despite this overall agreement, existing relationship marketing literature appears silent regarding the deciding factors that determine whether or not a business relationship is continued. More specifically the literature appears to lack any information and normative guidelines as to the relative importance of criteria when assessing the performance of a business relationship (i.e., the relative importance of performance criteria within and between relationship development stages).

Consequently, this study examined the bilateral

governance structure, business relationship development stages and performance measures in relationship marketing. A conceptual matrix framework was developed with the most representative performance measures in the framework being operationalised. The framework was tested with the aid of self-completion questionnaires in the UK manufacturing sector, the study setting, which has been achieved through a positivist empirical situational study in the form of scenarios.

The findings provided an original contribution to academia through an evaluation of the relative importance of performance measures as deciding factors in furthering the development of a business relationship within a bilateral governance structure. For example, there was differential importance of evaluation criteria within and between stages. Within all the stages trust was significant, whilst only commitment and transaction-specific asset investments were significant within the initiation stage; opportunistic behaviour was significant within the monitoring and termination stages; and distance within the initiation and monitoring stages. When moving from the initiation to monitoring stage, commitment and distance were significant. In addition, distance was also significant when moving from the monitoring to termination stages, and when moving from the initiation to termination stages, commitment and opportunistic behaviour were significant.

In addition, a contribution has been made to business

practice, through the development of normative managerial guidelines to aid decision-making when moving forward or not along the relational continuum under a bilateral governance structure. For example, trust was found to be a significant determinant for all stages of the business relationship and remains constant across all these stages. This implies that suppliers, whether potential or existing, should attempt to demonstrate high levels of trust at all stages of a business relationship. This can be achieved by different actions in different stages of the business relationship.

INTRODUCTION

If we could predict the future, then we would maximise our wealth by placing all our money on the most appropriate strategy. Many different strategies are possible in the future, but with the use of scenarios the future can be predicted based on the present conditions (Kahn and Weiner, 1967; Godet, 1982 and 1987). However, many performance measurement systems determine the future based on the past, for example: The results and determinants framework (Fitzgerald et al., 1991) measures the performance of service organisations and the European foundation quality model (EFQM, 1997) provides for-profit organisations with a total quality management approach to sharing experience and good practice. Strategic decision-making and performance measurement are important for relationship marketing, where firms are engaged in repeated contract-based transactions of idiosyncratic assets (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reviewed here is diverse bringing together several areas of study. As conceptualised by Dwyer et al. (1987) and Palay (1984) relationships evolve and develop through a sequential process of five phases: awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment and dissolution. Whereas Morgan and Hunt (1994) and Berry and Parasuraman (1991) define relationship marketing as the establishment, developing and maintaining of successful relational exchanges, Heide (1994) defines inter-firm governance in terms of an initiation, maintenance and relationship termination processes. Thus the three components of this research are discussed below:

Buyer-seller relationship stages: are based on time and, content and process variables, these relationships can then be broken down into a differing number of stages based on: continuous, 3-stage, 4-stage and 5-stage relationship types (Tyler, 1996; Halinen, 1998; Donaldson and O'Toole, 2000).

Governance: traditionally has been defined broadly

as a mode of organising transactions (Williamson, 1985). A more precise delineation of the concept is offered by Palay (1984), who defines it as a shorthand expression for the institutional framework in which exchanges are: initiated, negotiated, monitored, adapted and terminated (Dwyer et al., 1987). Relationships are the most important unit of analysis in order to understand the nature of the business-to-business marketing process (IMP Group, 1982). This view of marketing is based on a totally different philosophy from the marketing mix management approach (Webster, 1992; Brodie et al., 1997), the relationship philosophy relies on co-operation and a trusting relationship with customers, stakeholders and other network partners instead of an adversarial approach to customers (Grönroos, 1996).

Performance Measures and Measurement:

In marketing literature, it is frequently argued that performance measures should be derived from strategy and used to reinforce the importance of strategic variables (Skinner, 1969; Chakravarthy, 1986; Gould and Quinn, 1990; Kaplan and Norton, 2005). Although this does not appear to take place in reality (Neely et al., 1994), there is a link between performance and strategy, and the association between performance measurement and strategy is extensively explored in business strategy literature (Andrews, 1971; Lenz, 1981; Ansoff, 1995; De Toni and Tonchia, 2001).

The need to adopt a balanced range of financial and non-financial performance measures is widely accepted for strategy decision-making (Fiocca, 1982; Eccles, 1991). The gradual acceptance of non-financial performance measures requires a shift in organisational thinking, and a change in strategies, actions and performance measures. This has been deemed cutting the 'Gordian Knot' of misguided performance measurement by Dixon et al. (1990). Performance measurement is an important management process (Lusch and Brown, 1996). However, an integrated performance measurement system suitable for evaluating buyer-seller relationships has not yet been developed (Shaw and White, 1999). Companies define success through performance measures and by focusing on internal and external customer's needs. Customers' needs, expectations and requirements help establish organisational objectives and define the performance measures (Manoochehri, 1999). No single measure can cover all these aspects for management.

A structured set of measures and balanced management interpretation was needed as at each stage of the buyer-seller interaction process the relationship needed to be analysed. This required an overall review of performance, to assess progress during the development

of the business relationship and identification of key areas for improvement. Evaluation and relationship appraisal are key issues in strategic marketing (Fifield and Gilligan, 1997). Both academics and practitioners regularly research the determinants of success within relationship marketing (Ambler and Kokkinaki, 1997; Hilton, 2002).

The performance of an organisation is measured mainly through human resource, financial and marketing metrics. It is the author's opinion, however, that these metrics have not been effectively used to measure the performance of business-to-business buyer-seller governance structure trading exchanges (Low, 1999; Hilton, 2002) through any of the discussed performance measurement systems. From the literature review it became evident that financial metrics were more important during the initial stages of a business trading exchange. Innovation and end-user thoughts were the most important performance measures during the intervening stage of a 3-stage business exchange, whilst end-user behaviour was the most important performance measures during the final stage of the business trading exchange.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Although there is considerable literature there is a paucity of research that attempts to synthesise these three components: stages of the business relationship development, types of governance structures and performance measurement classifications. In order to redress this omission the author has synthesised the extant literature to produce the matrix that forms the

conceptual framework of this research and is presented in Figure 1.

There were two main groups of research hypotheses to be tested within a bilateral governance structure. The first group of hypotheses relate to the difference in the relative importance of a performance measure within a specific stage of the relationship development process.

Hypotheses 1: 'Trust', 'Commitment', 'Transaction Specific Asset Investments', 'Opportunistic Behaviour', 'Adaptation', 'Switching Costs' and 'Distance' are equally important performance measures within the <initiation - H1a> <monitoring - H1b> <termination - H1c> stage of the relationship development process, when deciding whether to continue or terminate a business exchange.

The second group of hypotheses relates to the difference in the relative importance of a performance measure between successive stages of the relationship development process.

Hypotheses 2: 'Trust', 'Commitment', 'Transaction Specific Asset Investments', 'Opportunistic Behaviour', 'Adaptation', 'Switching Costs' and 'Distance' are equally important performance measures when moving between the <initiation and monitoring - H2a> <monitoring and termination - H2b> <initiation through the monitoring and into the termination - H2c> stages of the relationship development process.

The performance of each performance measure represents the independent variable, while the decision as to whether to continue or terminate a business relationship at the end of the initiation, monitoring and termination stages are the dependent variables.

STAGES UNDER A BILATERAL EXCHANGE

	Initiation	Monitoring	Termination
End-user Thoughts and Feelings (Trust)	→	→	→
End-user Behaviour (Commitment)			
Internal Business Processes (Transaction Specific Asset Investments)			
Competitive Market (Opportunistic Behaviour)			
Innovation, Learning and Growth (Adaptation)			
Financial Performance (Switching Costs)			
Strategy, Structure and Culture (Distance)			



KEY:
 Evaluation of Performance Measures Between Stages of the Relationship Development under a Bilateral Governance Structure
 Evaluation of Performance Measures Within a Stage of the Relationship Development under a Bilateral Governance Structure

Figure 1: Conceptual Matrix Framework of Performance Measurement Classifications during the Business Relationship Development Process under a Bilateral Governance Structure

METHODOLOGY

The researcher views that the performance of business-to-business trading exchanges can be measured and has thus measured the outcome. The hypotheses were tested using scenarios in a contrived cross-sectional study of furniture manufacturers in the UK. A mail survey was employed as the primary data collection method with the aid of the Internet as another source. A total of 3,000 questionnaires were delivered to UK furniture manufacturers using a six-step sampling process (Dillman, 1978 and 1983). A variety of inducements were used to improve response rates and, from the scenarios that had been created, a hypothetico-deductive positivist approach was followed to empirically test the research hypotheses (Warburton, 2000; Sekaran, 2003). In addition the findings of the study sample were induced in order to be able to generalise to the wider population.

Overall a low response rate of 9.6% was obtained and the researcher was unable to elucidate the reasons for the low response rate. As the response rate was 9.6% partial least squares (PLS) and bootstrapping were the main statistical techniques used. These data analysis techniques could be used with smaller sample sizes (Chin, 1998; Chin and Newsted, 1999).

Data analysis: comprised assessment/analysis of measurement accuracy, reliability, validity and evaluation of the proposed model. The researcher evaluated the relative importance between performance measures during business exchanges along the different stages of the business relationship development process under the bilateral governance structure using Partial Least Squares.

Evaluation of proposed model: As the intention was to test the relative importance of seven independent variables (performance measures) to three non-metric dependent variables (decision to continue or not along stages of business relationship development) PLS was the main analytical technique. The statistical package for PLS was the software used as bootstrapping enabled the small sample size to be re-sampled to a larger sample size and Jack-knifing enabled cross-validation. Hence, the researcher empirically tested the conceptual framework in order to make generalisations on the wider population (Pallant, 2005).

RESULTS

First set of hypotheses evaluated the relative importance of performance measures as deciding factors in the development of business relationships within the different stages of a bilateral governance structure: The relative importance of performance

measures within stages of the relational continuum were evaluated using a scenario approach. Scenarios were constructed in which respondents were asked to assess the relative importance of performance measures within stages of the relational continuum under a bilateral governance structure. Using whether the relationship was continued or not as the dependent variable the impact/significance of each performance measure was assessed using PLS, separate analysis was carried out for each of the three stages. In addition, R2 was satisfactory within all three stages, with the model accounting for greater than 75% of the variance of the dependent variable for each stage (initiation stage, R2 = 0.790; monitoring stage, R2 = 0.768; termination stage, R2 = 0.841). From the results and relating to the hypotheses it can be concluded that:

Second set of hypotheses evaluated the relative importance of performance measures as deciding factors in the development of business relationships in progressing from one stage to the next within a bilateral governance structure: The relative importance of performance measures between stages of the relational continuum were evaluated in order to assess whether or not there were trends in the relative importance of performance measures between stages of the relational continuum under a bilateral governance structure. This was done by comparing the pathway coefficients of each of the independent constructs on whether a relationship was continued or not between the three stages.

CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH TO ACADEMIA AND MANAGEMENT

Despite an extensive review of extant literature the author has not been able to identify either conceptual or empirical research that has attempted to combine the above three components. More specifically, the literature does not offer any indication as to the relative importance of performance criteria within and between stages of the interaction process under different governance structures. The identified gap in the extant literature has shown it will be useful to have normative guidelines for practitioners when evaluating performance measures along the relational continuum (Investor Digest, 2001). Nohria et al., (2003) in their 4+2 formula have offered guidelines to form a successful organisation, but have not explicitly given guidelines for measuring the performance of relationships. Consequently the research proposed here aims to redress this omission in the extant literature and offer managers normative guidelines that could

help in their decision-making process.

Theoretical Contributions: From a theoretical standpoint the findings presented here provided considerable support to the extant literature. This is the first study that has evaluated the importance of the seven performance measures (trust, commitment, transaction specific asset investments, opportunistic behaviour, adaptation, switching costs and distance) as deciding factors across the three stages of a relationship (initiation, monitoring and termination) under a bilateral governance structure, more specifically:

Managerial Contributions: A firm needs to consider the important determinants during the decision to continue or not with a relationship, but as yet the literature has not provided normative guidelines to buyers on how this would be achieved (Porter, 1985; Perlmutter and Heenan, 1986).

As such, this author believes that the major managerial contribution of this research was the provision of a set of clearly defined, prescriptive guidelines that buying practitioners can use when evaluating the relative importance of performance measures as determinants during movements along the relational continuum, when deciding to continue or not with the relationship. These guidelines are empirically derived and reflect good practice, which is regarded as a strong differentiation of this research from all the studies debated. From a managerial standpoint the findings presented here provided considerable support to the normative guidelines.

CONCLUSIONS

Other dimensions could be added to the social process between two organisations, apart from behaviours and attitudes, for example ethics, religion, strategic orientation, executive values, environmental and industry characteristics. Relationship formation is a dynamic and processional phenomenon where many factors play important roles and it is very difficult to separate and represent the key critical performance measures in order to build a theoretical/conceptual model at the necessary level of parsimony. Adding more performance measures to the model, as well as more stages (Dwyer et al., 1987) and evaluating the market, unilateral and network governance structures (Heide, 1994; Bradach and Eccles, 1989) would develop this research further and provide additional insights. However, in this study seven dimensions of performance measurements have been used, but this limited number represents the wider constructs and can be generalised. Nevertheless, the seven

performance measurement dimensions are extensive and cover all the main areas involved in decision-making by managers during a business trading exchange.

Industry mindsets are potentially a valuable field for similar empirical inquiry in relationship marketing in the business environment, an understanding of the core set of assumptions should certainly allow insight into an industry's perception of its environment, internal interpersonal relationships, intra-industry structures and processes, if knowledge is shared at this level of analysis. In addition, it should provide academic organisation researchers and practitioners with a basis from which to interpret and anticipate characteristics of cross-industry interactions. Thus, activities that potentially pose cultural issues e.g., mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures, managing conglomerate organisations, communicating with or assimilating employees from other industries could be facilitated (Webster, 1992).

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