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Managing supplier satisfaction: Social capital and resource dependence frameworks



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ABSTRACT

Recently, supplier satisfaction has gained more attention both in practice and in academic research. However, the knowledge accumulation process is still in an embryonic and explorative phase. Likewise, supplier satisfaction measuring in practice may still benefit from an impetus from academia to be more widely used. This paper aims at considerably expanding understanding of supplier satisfaction by proposing to apply a social capital and a resource dependence theory perspective. We expect an abundance of social capital in a relationship to relate positively to supplier satisfaction, whilst power disequilibrium and dependence from the buyer are expected to negatively relate to supplier satisfaction. It is worth highlighting that, according to research rooted in Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, the perception and acceptance of power differences resulting from a situation of dependency is highly culture specific. We therefore further hypothesise that supplier satisfaction will be moderated by cultural differences and ask researchers to take the cultural dimension into account.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

近来，供应商的满意度得到了更多的关注，无论是在实践中还是在学术研究领域。但是，知识的积累过程还处于萌芽和探索阶段。同样，将学术推动力更广泛地付诸于实践也有益于衡量供应商的满意度。本文提议采用社会资本和资源依赖理论的角度，旨在极大地提高对供应商满意度的理解。我们预计巨大的社会资本会出现于供应商和客户关系中，而这将会与供应商的满意度有积极的关联，但是权力的不平衡和来自购买方的依赖性预计将会消极地影响供应商的满意度。值得强调的是，根据以Hofstede的文化维度模型为基础的研究表明，对于因依赖而产生的权力差异的感知和接受有着极高的文化特定性。因此，我们做出了进一步假设，即供应商的满意度将会通过文化的差异来调节，并要求研究人员将文化的维度纳入考虑。

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1. Objectives: understanding the antecedents of supplier satisfaction in order to achieve preferential resource allocation from suppliers

At least two business trends may have driven the recent increase in research that addresses supplier satisfaction. First, a fundamental change in supply chain organisation has resulted in increasing responsibilities to suppliers. Second, this shift has coincided with a reduction of suppliers in many business-to-business markets. The resulting increased reliance on a fewer number of suppliers has prompted a supplier availability problem for buyers and,

in turn, a resource allocation problem for sellers. In essence, the problem is that suppliers have constraints on the resources that they can devote to any particular endeavour and “may only have the time and resources to form and satisfy the expectations of a limited number of alliances. By making choices to ally with some partners, others are *ipso facto* excluded” (Gulati et al., 2000, p. 210). Buying firms may not wish to belong to that group of “*ipso facto* excluded” customers. In a situation of supplier scarcity, those suppliers might be in a position to decide to which customer they allocate the bulk of their resources. If they are unsatisfied with the relationship with a certain buyer, this one is unlikely to be the winner in the resource allocation decision of the supplier.

Supplier scarcity has been reported in several industries, such as the luxury car industry in which producers rely on the same 30 suppliers for components of Mercedes E-class, Audi A6 and BMW

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5 automobiles (Wagner and Bode, 2011); the biotech field (Powell et al., 1996); software production (Lavie, 2007); and the railway industry (Schiele, 2008). For many types of industrial materials, no more than two or three leading suppliers remain in the market. As a result, these suppliers often become highly selective and do not dedicate their resources equally to all of their customers. Williamson (1991) argues that a supplier generally “responds first to the needs of his/her preferred customers” (p. 83), whereas less preferred customers are “forced to wait in a queue” (p. 81). In cases of uncertainty, suppliers first attend to their strategically important preferred customers and only subsequently conduct business with their regular customers. Schiele et al. (2011), Baxter (2012), Ellis et al. (2012) and Tóth et al. (2015) provide large-scale empirical evidence of the relevance of this phenomenon. This scenario represents a counterintuitive inversion of the classical marketing approach: to achieve preferred status and the associated benefits, buyers are competing for suppliers rather than the converse. The underlying assumption here is that supplier satisfaction is a necessary condition to achieve preferential resource allocation by suppliers (Schiele et al., 2012).

The implication of this role reversal, namely, the phenomenon of buyers that attempt to obtain the best resources from suppliers, is that they now have to care about supplier satisfaction. Caring for seller’s satisfaction motivates important, related questions: how can buyers affect supplier satisfaction and how can existing theories be leveraged to explain this phenomena? Advancing testable insights to guide future empirical research helps accelerate the understanding of supplier satisfaction by increasing research results’ compatibility, speeding up the mutual learning effect of diverse researchers, and systematically providing new insights around a phenomenon at hand. Evidence from extant literature supports this view, as theory-based studies tend to be cited more frequently (Chicksand et al., 2012). This paper will therefore take a theory-based perspective and propose social capital theory and resource dependency theory as perspectives to describe the phenomenon and, eventually, derive recommendations on improving supplier satisfaction, in order to ensure preferential resource allocation by the supplier.

In the following sections, we advance the intellectual background of the proposed research approach. Initially, we briefly review contemporary supplier satisfaction research and link it to social capital theory and resource dependence theories. Subsequently, we draw from Hofstede’s multi-cultural research (1980) to establish the comparative management method of a multinational approach. Testable hypotheses are formulated.

2. Intellectual background: social capital theory and resource dependency theory

2.1. Supplier satisfaction as prerequisite for buyers to achieve preferential resource allocation from suppliers

Although customer satisfaction has already been recognised as relevant to business success for decades (see e.g. Anderson and Narus, 1990; Cannon and Perreault, 1999; Dwyer et al., 1987; Sigauw et al., 1998; Walter et al., 2003), supplier satisfaction has remained largely unexplored. However, supplier satisfaction may well be a prerequisite to accessing supplier resources. Those suppliers unsatisfied with the relationship with a particular buyer might be reluctant to provide this buyer with forms of preferential treatment. Wong (2000) was one of the first researchers to note that “partnering efforts should also take into consideration the satisfaction of the suppliers” (p. 427) because those efforts will not succeed if the suppliers’ needs cannot be satisfied in the process. He stated that in a cooperative culture, the commitment to supplier satisfaction and constructive controversy will secure the full and whole-hearted support of the suppliers.

In sum, the author suggested that a relational and cooperative approach towards suppliers will result in supplier satisfaction with the relationship.

A similar conclusion was reached in a dyadic survey by Forker and Stannack (2000), who compared the effects of contrasting competitive and cooperative exchange relationships on the degree of buyers and supplier satisfaction. In line with Wong’s assumption, buyers and suppliers in cooperative relationships expressed greater satisfaction than their counterparts in competitive relationships. However, buyers and suppliers appear to have a better shared understanding, in that they sense that the value they provide is compensated with equal value received, within the competitive relationship than the cooperative one. One possible goal for buyers aiming to increase supplier satisfaction could be to enter into more intimate relationships but organise interaction in a way that enhances the suppliers’ perceptions of reciprocity and transparency.

Whipple et al. (2002) empirically tested the effect that information sharing between trading partners has on the dyad’s overall satisfaction. They found that an increase in the amount of operational information exchanged has a positive impact on alliance satisfaction. However, their study also revealed differences in the perception between the dyadic partners. Whereas buyers appear to value the accuracy of the information exchanged, the additional critical factor impacting supplier satisfaction was the timeliness of the information exchange. As information and its early provision are particularly essential to a supplier’s internal planning processes, it has a direct impact on the satisfaction experienced by the supplier.

Maunu (2003) described a conceptual framework with nine supplier satisfaction dimensions grouped under two headings: business-related dimensions and communication-related dimensions. Business-related supplier satisfaction dimensions are concrete, fact-based values and include profitability, agreements, early supplier involvement, business continuity and forecasting/planning. In contrast, communication-related dimensions are softer, human-based values. These values are composed of roles and responsibilities, openness and trust, feedback and the buying company’s values. Relying on these nine dimensions, Maunu (2003) developed a questionnaire that allows the buying company to improve its processes with suppliers and external partners by measuring supplier satisfaction.

Benton and Maloni (2005) stated that “a supply chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Thus, a manufacturer cannot be responsive without satisfied suppliers” (p. 2). In their paper, these authors empirically tested the ways in which power-driven buyer–supplier relationships affect both performance and satisfaction. The authors differentiated between coercive-mediated power sources, reward-mediated power sources and non-mediated power sources. Whereas coercive-mediated power sources were found to have a negative effect on satisfaction, reward-mediated and non-mediated power sources were found to affect the level of supplier satisfaction in a positive way. Additionally, there was no evidence that performance drives satisfaction. Thus, supplier satisfaction appears to be driven primarily by the nature of the buyer–supplier relationship rather than by performance. If the power holder attempts to promote satisfaction, a relationship-driven supply chain strategy based on rewards and non-mediated power sources should be emphasised rather than a performance-based strategy.

Leenders et al. (2005) argued that relationship marketing efforts should also be applied upstream of the supply chain. To clarify the current purchaser–supplier relationship in terms of satisfaction and stability, these authors provided a framework called “The Purchaser–Supplier Satisfaction Matrix.” According to Leenders et al. (2005), positions on the satisfaction chart can be improved by a number of marketing and supply management tools. These include: granting substantial volumes, long-term commitments, and exclusivity

agreements; sharing internal information and extensive communication; exhibiting a willingness to change behaviour in the purchasing organisation; and responding rapidly to requests from suppliers.

Essig and Amann (2009) explored the construct of supplier satisfaction as a factor of buyer–supplier relationship quality. They operationalised this complex construct through an index and measured its determinants using a survey. The supplier satisfaction index contains 36 indicators that are subsumed to three dimensions and six factors. The first dimension refers to the ‘strategic level’ of a relationship and contains indicators that allow for conclusions about the intensity of cooperation (e.g., the degree of earliness of integration in the production processes). The second dimension of supplier satisfaction is also determined by factors on the ‘operative level.’ Essig and Amann (2009) divided this dimension into questions about the order process (e.g., adherence to arrangements) and billing/delivery process (e.g., payment procedures). The third dimension, called the ‘accompanying level’, reflects communication, conflict management, and general relationship variables that influence satisfaction. Subordinate indicators to these variables include the quality and frequency of information and reaction speed.

Nyaga et al. (2010) examined the effects of collaborative activities, such as dedicated investments, information sharing and joint effort, on performance and satisfaction from the perspectives of both buyers and suppliers. The authors found that all three collaborative activities have a positive effect on satisfaction, and that this effect is mediated individually or simultaneously by trust and commitment. To strengthen supplier satisfaction, buyers should demonstrate a particular interest in information sharing and joint effort (e.g., working on joint teams and conducting joint planning). Invariance tests indicated a dichotomy in the “buyers’ focus on relationship outcomes versus suppliers’ focus on collaborative activities” (p. 110).

The approaches that can be taken by buyers to increase supplier satisfaction have also been described by Ghijzen et al. (2010), who analysed the impact of influence strategies and supplier development on the supplier commitment and satisfaction. The authors differentiated between indirect influence strategies (information exchange and recommendations) and direct strategies (requests, promises, threats and legalistic pleas). In addition, two dimensions of direct supplier development activities were taken into account, human-specific supplier development and capital-specific supplier development. These authors found that buyers “should attach more importance to indirect [. . .] influence strategies and capital-specific supplier development efforts to stimulate supplier satisfaction” (p. 24). Requests, threats and legalistic pleas were found to have a negative effect on satisfaction.

Finally, based on their literature review, identifying no less than 28 antecedents to supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2012), Hüttinger et al. (2014) have conducted a world café workshop and empirically tested a set of criteria which have been assumed to influence suppliers’ satisfaction with their customers. Key account managers indicated that their customers’ growth opportunity, reliability and relational behaviour explain satisfaction to a considerable extent.

Two major tendencies can be observed when considering the papers on supplier satisfaction. First, many authors ground their work in the purchasing and supply management literature to test the impact of different relationship strategies on satisfaction. Wong (2000) and Forker and Stannack (2000) found that cooperation, rather than competition, appears to be the supply management strategy that promotes the highest levels of supplier satisfaction. This finding coincides with those of Benton and Maloni (2005) and Nyaga et al. (2010), in that supplier satisfaction is driven primarily by a relationship-based supply chain strategy. Whereas buyers are more focused on performance and outcomes, suppliers appear to place

more importance on the relationship atmosphere and the development of norms. Here, a potential mismatch and cause for unsatisfactory relationships may emerge. Second, a different stream of studies draws conceptual support from the marketing or supply chain management literature to emphasise business- and communication-related factors. In particular, attendant modes of interaction (e.g., information sharing) and operational excellence (billing, delivery, forecasting and planning) appear to be major prerequisites for supplier satisfaction in practice-oriented papers (Essig and Amann, 2009; Leenders et al., 2005; Maunu, 2003; Whipple et al., 2002). These works, with a strong managerial emphasis, do not explain on a theoretical level why certain items should be included within or excluded from satisfaction assessments, resulting in more or less extensive lists.

In sum, our review suggests that theories elaborating on buyer–supplier relations are needed to explain satisfaction. The use of theory would provide a robust platform to develop constructs and test hypotheses on the mechanisms leading to supplier satisfaction. Social capital theory and resource dependence theory could provide such theory-based perspectives.

2.2. Social capital: abundance of structural, cognitive and relational capital antecedents to supplier satisfaction

Social capital theory has its origins in sociology. “Social Capital is the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor’s social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor” (Adler and Kwon, 2002, p. 23). Social capital refers to resources, of actual and potential nature, which are embedded within, and available to a network of relationships (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). As such, it can be seen as the social ties between actors – whether individuals or corporate actors – that facilitate these actors to obtain certain benefits from these ties (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). Hence, social capital theory might usefully be employed to understand resource allocation mechanisms in a business exchange. Consequently, scholars within the supply chain management field have already used this theory as a theoretic lens (e.g. Hartmann and Herb, 2014; Horn et al., 2014; Koka and Prescott, 2002; Krause et al., 2007; Lawson et al., 2008). However, despite these scientific efforts, the picture of social capital and its role in a firm’s value creation has remained unclear to a large extent (Hughes and Perrons, 2011).

The underlying idea of social capital theory in this context is that buyer–supplier relationships represent multi-organisational social processes, forcing the partners to interact, exchange information, and to form relationships based on interdependencies, exchanges, and mutual problem-solving. The positive conditions necessary for the exchange of such resources depend upon the development of social capital within these relationships (Hughes and Perrons, 2011).

According to Coleman’s (1994) broadly shared view, social capital covers any aspect of social structure, facilitating the creation of value and supporting the actions of individuals that belong to the social structure under investigation (Seibert et al., 2001). Based on this understanding, social capital can be defined as “the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit” (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). That is, the guiding idea of social capital is the recognition of another’s goodwill towards a certain entity as a valuable resource (Adler and Kwon, 2002).

To build propositions, this research adopts the dimensions of social capital theory as described by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), which have found wide application in a business context and may well develop into the standard (Hartmann and Herb, 2014). Nahapiet

and Ghoshal identify and delineate three dimensions of social capital, structural, cognitive and relational capital.

Structural social capital refers to the pattern of connections between entities i.e., individuals or organisations, and how these can be used (Burt, 1997; Villena et al., 2011). Hence, the presence or absence of network ties between actors is an important facet of this dimension (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Depending upon structural configurations, valuable resources that can lead to competitive advantages can be accessed (Barney, 1991). For this reason, closure and density within the social structures are of major interest, since they facilitate the exchange of resources (Zaheer and Bell, 2005). Further, various scholars have suggested that partnering entities can foster the exchange of reliable and diverse information (Guido et al., 2006; Koka and Prescott, 2002; Villena et al., 2011). As a result, particularly dense structures are assumed to be beneficial in so far as they allow the reception of the right information at the right time (Zaheer and Bell, 2005). Another potential benefit of dense relationship structures is the possibility of validating information and therefore increasing its reliability, as well as its diversity (Chen et al., 2009; Villena et al., 2011). For this reason, social capital theory argues that structural social capital is a valuable resource for both relationships within organisations, as well as between them. The presence of a dense network of ties offering a multitude of channels for articulation towards the customer and from the customer is likely to contribute to the satisfaction with a business relationship. Therefore, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 1a. The abundant availability of structural capital is likely to increase the level of supplier satisfaction.

The cognitive dimension of social capital includes shared interpretations, comparable to codes or paradigms that facilitate the understanding of the social system and its respective goals in terms of norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs (Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998; Uphoff and Wijayarathna, 2000). In this context, “shared culture refers to the degree to which norms of behavior govern relationships, whereas congruent goals represent the degree to which parties share a common understanding and approach to the achievement of common tasks and outcomes” (Villena et al., 2011, p. 562). As such, if both parties of a buyer–supplier relation share the same business values and have the same goals it can be argued that a maximum level of cognitive capital is present. Consequently, solidarity and a strategic consensus in the form of a common understanding of strategic goals and processes emerge as key benefits of cognitive capital (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Atuahene-Gima and Murray, 2007). It can be expected that the similarity of organisational cultures influence the corporate success of buyer–supplier relationships (Parkhe, 1993). The reasons for this relationship are manifold. Among others, often mentioned are constraints of undesirable behaviour in favour of collective interests (Coleman, 1994) and improved harmony and the reduction of opportunistic behaviour (Ouchi, 1980). There might be a geographical dimension attached to cognitive capital; buyers and suppliers located in the same regional cluster are more likely to share similar business values (Pulles and Schiele, 2013). Business partners which show a substantial degree of similarity are likely to understand each other better than fundamentally diverse organisations. Arguments of homophily apply here (Podolny, 1994). Hence, we postulate:

Hypothesis 1b. The abundant availability of cognitive capital is likely to increase the level of supplier satisfaction.

The relational dimension of social capital, finally, is grounded on the notion of embeddedness of Granovetter and Swedberg (1992), and refers to the personal relationships that people have developed with each other over time through interactions (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Mutual trust and commitment play a major role in

The abundance of social capital in a buyer-supplier relationship is likely to have a positive influence on supplier satisfaction

Figure 1: Social capital perspective

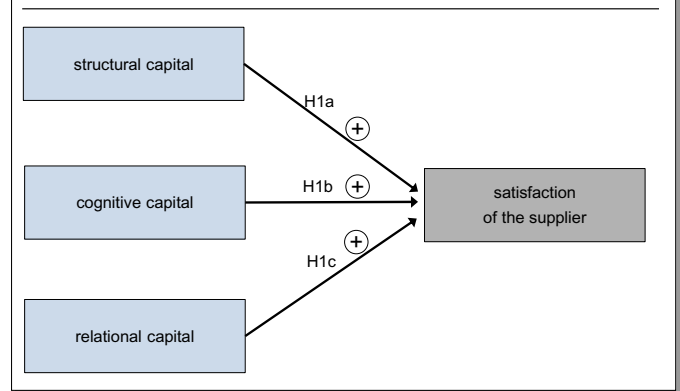


Fig. 1. Social capital perspective.

the relational component (e.g. Lee and Cavusgil, 2006) so the relational dimension is often delineated into trust and commitment. The development of a trusted relation may need established channels of communication as well as frequent interaction (Hartmann and Herb, 2014). As a result of relational capital, the risk of opportunistic behaviour as well as the possible leakage of critical knowledge is reduced (Kale et al., 2000). The absence of opportunistic behaviour, in turn, is likely to increase the satisfaction with the relationship. Hence, relational capital can improve corporate performance and supplier satisfaction (Lawson et al., 2008). We hypothesise:

Hypothesis 1c. The abundant availability of relational capital is likely to increase the level of supplier satisfaction.

In sum, the availability of social capital in its forms of structural, cognitive and relational capital is likely to positively influence supplier satisfaction (Fig. 1). The opposite seems to be true in the case of power imbalance, such as that described in resource dependence theory and discussed next.

2.3. Resource dependence theory: power-imbalance as an impediment to supplier satisfaction

In their review of resource dependence theory, Davis and Cobb (2010) summarise the theory's main body with the following managerial recommendation: “Choose the least-constraining device to govern relations with your exchange partners that will allow you to minimize uncertainty and dependence and maximize your autonomy” (p. 24). Uncertainty and dependency are the two key variables discussed, whose properties can be explained based on a description of the characteristics and the distribution of the resources exchanged in the relationship at hand. That resources are an important input for firms is already known and has been for a long time.

The idea of reducing environmental uncertainty dates back to Thompson (1967). Emerson (1962) discussed the dependence of relations and the power control over valuable resources. Sixteen years later the resource dependency theory arose based on a study reported in a book by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978). The basic concept of resource dependency theory developed within a relatively short period and has remained intact since then (Drees and Heugens, 2013). Resource dependency theory (RDT) was originally developed to analyse the market failures at that time and an alternative way to understand which inter-organisational relations were present

(Davis and Cobb, 2010). Subsequently the RDT has often been used to study and help firms reduce uncertainty and dependence on external influences (Hillman et al., 2009) and with the purpose of managing their environments (Davis and Cobb, 2010).

Generally, according to RDT, organisations benefit from reaching a maximum level of independence (Ulrich and Barney, 1984). However, firms who are lacking resources will have to obtain these resources by establishing relationships with others. Firms are seen as organisations forming inter-organisational collaborations of diverse intensity in order to acquire and maintain needed external resources. RDT advances a variety of possible means to manage external relations including (i) increasing the number of potential suppliers to reduce dependence on any single supplier and (ii) forming alliances with selected partners and exchanging board members to increase interdependence and coordination when alternate sources of needed resources are few (Davis and Cobb, 2010).

The foundation of RDT is based on the assumption that dependence on the external environment for critical resources influences organisational actions and that such organisational actions can be explained by the particular dependency situation (Nienhueser, 2009). Another assumption is that whoever controls resources has the power over the organisations that need these resources. Acquiring the resources minimises dependence on other organisations and maximises dependence of other organisations on themselves. Lastly, RDT characterises the corporation as an open system, dependent on contingencies in the external environment. These theoretical assumptions are particularly suitable for the buyer–supplier exchange environment (Hillman et al., 2009; Paulraj and Chen, 2007). That is, the exchange environment includes scarce and valued resources essential to organisational survival. Thus the environment poses the problem of organisations facing uncertainty in resource acquisition.

There have been a few attempts to link dependency and satisfaction in buyer–supplier relationships. Anderson and Narus (1990) link power in a relationship to an expected increase in conflict, resulting in less satisfaction. Their empirical model provides evidence for the negative link between control and satisfaction. In contrast, Andaleeb (1996) finds a positive relation between dependence and satisfaction. Facing these ambiguous empirical findings, a referral to RDT would emphasise the expectation of a negative relation between power and satisfaction. Assuming actors follow the guidelines of RDT to reduce dependency and increase autonomy, if a supplier faces a buyer on which it is dependent, thus effectively impeded in achieving autonomy, dissatisfaction will result. Hence, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 2a. The more the supplier is dependent on the buyer, the less satisfied the supplier is likely to be.

Whilst previous ambiguous results may be owed to differences in construct operationalisation, we offer a theoretical explanation suggesting that the negative effect of dependence on satisfaction may depend on the buyers' attitude towards power and their acceptance of power distance – i.e., their willingness to accept unequal power distribution within an exchange relationship. The acceptance of power distance is strongly influenced by national culture (Hofstede, 1991), and the important role of power distance has been substantiated in previous research applying resource dependence theory, such as in joint ventures (Lin, 2004), buyer–supplier relationships in banking (Dash et al., 2006) or channel members' satisfaction (Su et al., 2008). In countries where power distance is more accepted, there are indications that power distance between buyer and seller will also be more accepted and may represent less of a problem than in low power distance societies. Therefore, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 2b. The influence of buyer power on supplier satisfaction will positively be moderated by the power distance avoidance

attitude, i.e. in low power distance cultures the power unbalance will more strongly reduce supplier satisfaction.

A second core explanatory theme of RDT involves uncertainty (Hillman et al., 2009; Song and Montoya-Weiss, 2001). Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) argue that uncertainty in resource supply will challenge the persistence of the organisation suffering from this uncertainty: "If participants have come to rely on an organization for performances or resources and these become unpredictable, the benefits of participation in the coalition diminish, and it is in the interests of all participants either to abandon the unstable organization for a more stable coalition or to stabilize the uncertainty confronting the organization" (p. 47). The underlying assumption here is that participants of the exchange relationship relate their satisfaction with uncertainty and, therefore, become dissatisfied if the level of uncertainty in the relationship gets too high. We therefore hypothesise:

Hypothesis 3a. The more uncertainty in the continuation of the exchange relationship, the less satisfied the supplier is likely to be.

Similar to power distance, acceptance of uncertainty is one of the cultural dimensions Hofstede (1991) identified. The implication is that firms acting in cultures with low uncertainty avoidance are more willing to engage in business relationships despite their uncertain character. This has been illustrated in a cross-cultural study based on resource dependency where firms in high uncertainty avoiding cultures were more reluctant to enter technology alliances in the presence of technological uncertainty (Steenma et al., 2000). To the extent that uncertainty drives supplier dissatisfaction, it could be expected that firms in high uncertainty avoiding cultures will be more affected by uncertainty induced problems than those firms in low uncertainty avoiding (i.e., high uncertainty accepting) cultures (Fig. 2). Hence,

Hypothesis 3b. The influence of uncertainty on supplier satisfaction will positively be moderated by uncertainty avoidance attitude, i.e. in cultures with high uncertainty avoiding attitude, uncertainty will more strongly reduce supplier satisfaction.

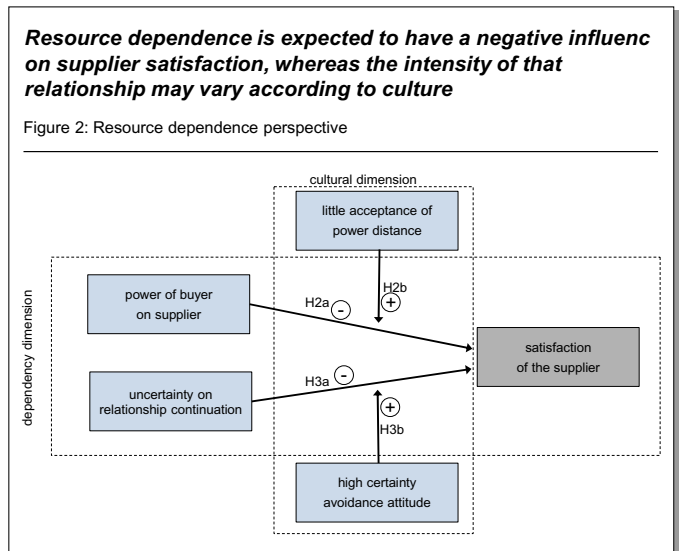


Fig. 2. Resource dependence perspective.

3. Conclusion: social capital theory and resource dependency theory as avenues for research in supplier satisfaction and resource allocation

According to Pulles et al. (2014, p. 17): “. . . if a firm wants to attain competitive advantage through resources obtained from its supply chain, this firm needs to obtain *better* supplier resources than competitors” (italics in original). Competition for suppliers’ resources leads to supply base rivalry which, in turn, draws the attention of firms to supplier satisfaction. Buying firms with unsatisfied suppliers or whose suppliers are less satisfied with them compared to rival buyers, are unlikely to win in the struggle for suppliers’ resources. It is important to note, though, that possibly the path between supplier satisfaction and preferred customer treatment is not a direct one. Baxter (2012), for instance, found it to be fully mediated by the suppliers’ commitment.

Social Capital Theory and Resource Dependency Theory can provide patterns of explanation for supplier satisfaction, which have been used here to formulate testable propositions. The presence of substantial amounts of structural, cognitive and relational social capital in a buyer–supplier relation is expected to correlate to higher levels of satisfaction with this relationship, thus forming a good “starting position” in supplier resource allocation challenges. Likewise, the two cornerstones of a resource dependency-based argumentation, power and uncertainty, could be operationalised as explanatory antecedents of supplier satisfaction or, more precisely: explain supplier dissatisfaction. Power of the buyer over the supplier and uncertainty with the relationship continuation are expected to have a negative effect on the supplier satisfaction. Cultural aspects may have to be taken into account, when interpreting resource dependency approaches. This may not only be true for the case of supplier satisfaction, but generally apply for resource dependency argumentations.

Employing these suggestions, two fruitful ways to advance research in supplier satisfaction can be proposed. Even stronger, exceeding the particular case of supplier satisfaction, which is only one conditional antecedent of preferential resource allocation, it can be suggested that both theories can provide particularly suitable theoretical frameworks for studies of resource management and mobilisation in buyer–seller relationships.

Future research would benefit from empirically testing the propositions derived from these theories. What is further needed, as a logical but often-neglected ultimate step in this type of research, is the transformation of the insights gained into actionable models and tools applicable for the business context.

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