

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

MASTER OF BUSINESS (RESEARCH) IN MARKETING THESIS

**THESIS TOPIC: THE CHANGING VALUE OF INTERFIRM
RELATIONSHIPS (SUSTAINABILITY)**

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

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I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the interpersonal nature of the interfirm buyer-seller relationship through which the impact of the key thematic processes of relational trust, sustainability and communications are considered. The integrating theory of complexity is reviewed as a way of viewing the dynamic nature of interfirm relationships, and serves as the binding force in the discussion.

The literature review considers the evolution of interfirm relational sustainability through examination of contemporary research.

The methodology which has been developed combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The first stage, the quantitative research utilizes an existing database of business relationship interviews to provide general insights and augments this with the findings from the qualitative research, which consists of a series of depth interviews with people from different industries.

The results of the research largely confirm the findings of the literature and empirical analysis that communication, relational sustainability and trust can be explained through the use of complex adaptive systems.

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CHAPTER ONE — INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This thesis examines the topic of sustainable interfirm relationships and how they are expedited by the general character of the relationships that surround them and within which they operate. More specifically, it examines the ways they are driven by trust and communications. The way in which this *process* of sustaining occurs is examined via the use of complexity theory.

This research is timely. There are signs that scholars and those involved in business-to-business relationships may be converging in thought as to the importance of self-replicating (i.e. self-sustaining) networks of relationships. The literature review presented in the following chapter includes work not only from marketing scholars, but also from management, information technology, mathematics, communications, economics, philosophy and the social sciences. There is a marked interconnection of thought and application with respect to the need for, and value of, sustainability in business and more particularly in business relationships.

Thus the general research problem of this thesis is how interfirm relationships are effectively sustained in the face of changing values and conditions of undertaking business.

1.1 Objectives

There is increasing emphasis in the private and public sector on interfirm relationships in a number of contexts. Industry research (Forrester Research 2007) continues to highlight that the business-to-business marketplace is worth much more than the business-to-consumer market. A central characteristic of business-to-business markets is that business relationships are connected into networks (Ford and IMP Group 2002). However, how to expedite and manage these networks of relationships is disputed. For example, there are diametrically opposed points of view as to how relationships can be, and need to be built — with one group advocating the need for swift trust in business

relationships due to an increase in ecommerce (Blomqvist & Stahl 1997), while others suggest that the process of building sustainable relationships is long and involved and requires substantial investment, not only of time but of emotion between individuals involved in such relationships. (Denize & Young 2007)

The objectives of this research follow from this lack of consensus and focus on providing further insights into relational processes. More specifically the objectives are:

1. To review and analyze contemporary academic thought about sustainable business-to-business relationships, including the nature and value of sustaining business relationships.
2. To consider the sustainability of relationships in the context of complexity theory as a mechanism for better understanding the process of such interactions.
3. To empirically explore the drivers of sustainability, as a device for better understanding the evolution and perceived value of relationships.

1.2 The Themes of the Literature

This section introduces the areas of literature which have been included in this thesis. Subsequent discussion considers their nature and interconnections in greater detail.

Sustainability has been defined as a way of holding together a relationship or set of relationships (*Macquarie Dictionary* 2003). In considering business, and more specifically, the sustainability of interfirm relationships there are a number of relevant perspectives including economic, social and environmental sustainability (Dunphy & Benn 2002).

Interfirm relationships are defined, for the purposes of this research, as the continuing interaction through time of separate entities (Levitt 2003). These are examined using the Industrial Marketing and Purchasing (IMP) perspective which argues that interfirm relationships are built and sustained by forging links, ties and actor bonds (Ford and IMP Group 2002). There are also other views which enrich such a discussion including the belief that the nature of business relationships is reflected in the relationship

research within the social sciences (Levitt 2003), and that longevity of relationships can be seen to contribute to sustainable relationships.

Trust is defined as a belief that another person will do the right thing (*Macquarie Dictionary* 2003). Trust literature highlights a number of aspects of trust and that affectual trust (Denize & Young 2007), plays a particularly important role in underpinning positive emotions which support relational sustainability. Also noted is that the absence of a feeling of trust may have negative effects on how organizations relate to each other and thus on the sustainability of their relationships.

Recent scholarly contributions (Denize and Young 2007; Tomlinson 2006; Ford and IMP Group 2002), suggest that communication is increasingly seen as central to sustaining relationships as it is both a driver and facilitator of more effective dialogue (Management Decisions, 2006). Both positive and negative communications are part of the process of building lasting alliances between organizations. Again, there are obvious links between this and both trust and sustainability.

Complexity Theory is utilized to analyze the underlying processes of sustainability and adaptation in relationships. Complexity theory is employed in fields as varied as mathematics, the natural sciences and the social sciences to explain change. Its applicability is being increasingly recognized, with Hawking (2000) expressing the belief that the 21st century would be the century of complexity. We see applications of complexity in contexts such as autogenesis and self-replication which are reflected in research into social networks (Ford & IMP Group 2002).

1.3 Organization of the thesis

The organization of the thesis is as follows. First, the literature review in chapter two, explores the theme of sustaining interfirm relationships according to the interrelationships of communications, trust, and commitment. In chapter 3 the research methodology is explained and justification is provided as to why mixed methodology has been selected. Following this, business relational drivers are considered via quantitative analysis of data from the Emotions Study from the Interfirm Relations Research Programme (IRRP). This consists of structured interviews with B2B relationship participants. The nature of business relationships and in particular the way

they are sustained is considered in chapter 5 via qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with respondents who are engaged in interfirm relationships. These are examined using key word and content analysis. These findings are also contrasted and compared with the earlier findings in the quantitative analysis. Finally in chapter 6 the conclusions of the research are presented, including findings and opportunities to continue research in this area.

1.4 Research Problem and Hypotheses

The broad research problem is one of ascertaining the nature of the processes (with particular emphasis on trust and communication) which enable firms to effectively sustain their relationships with each other in evolving business environments. The changing nature of the relations demands that the research problem can only be examined effectively within the boundaries and framework of complexity theory. The research goals which emerge from this question consider the following:

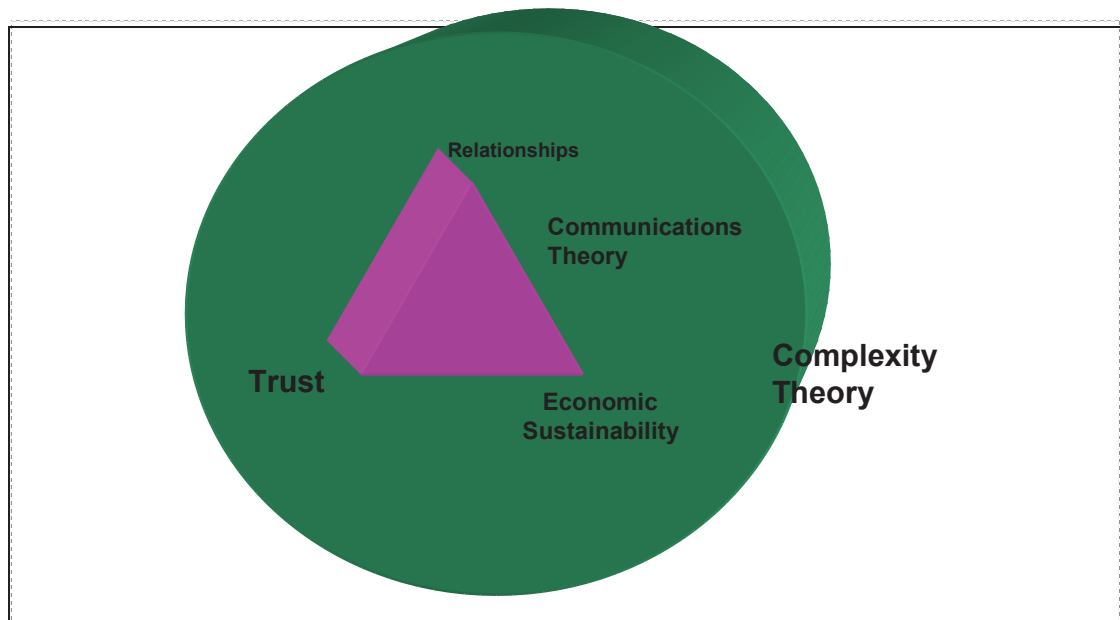
The process of effectively sustaining business relationships and the way it operates

The extent to which theories of sustainability offer insights and/or meaningful solutions to productive reproduction of relationships

The ways in which complexity theory adds to the topic of sustaining business relationships

It is argued here that the process of sustaining business relationships is multifaceted and involves a number of key areas including trust and communications, business relations and complexity theory all of which are interlinked. To understand the contribution of each, each area is considered in turn before considering the interconnections between the areas

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework above represents the interrelatedness of the processes which contribute to interfirm relational sustainability (explored in the literature review that follows). The key processes of interpersonal trust and communications are included within the triangle as well as sustainability and relationships. This represents their connectedness and where they overlap. The circle surrounding the triangle represents the complex nature of the relationships and their environment. These are complex in that the deeper nature of relational continuation takes place along with a change in values considering effective order, emergence, self-replication and autopesis.

1.5 The Research Methodology

The methodology used was “mixed”, with the emotions database of more than 350 interviews being analyzed using standard statistical measures and bivariate analysis (Fernandez-Aguirre et al., 2003) . A series of in-depth interviews was content analyzed. The results of the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study were compared for additional insight.

The methodology chosen was justified as follows. The emotions database of interviews

was conducted face-to-face in order to discuss specific feelings which respondents held for another person in a business relationship. The inclusion of scales of measurement for these feelings and intentions held by the respondents was strongly grounded in the literature of social psychology and emotions. It was felt that the most accurate completion of the questionnaires could be achieved through face-to-face interviews in preference to telephone or mail interviews, and that doing so minimized the risk of respondents responding without due consideration to the questions and that this approach also encouraged them not to rush through the questionnaires. This was complemented by a series of in-depth interviews with respondents involved in interfirm relationships. This is a way of looking at relationship process and evolution that offers greater validity than can be achieved in a cross-sectional study.

CHAPTER TWO — REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE

2. Introduction

This chapter presents definitions and a discussion of sustainability before introducing and interrelating the areas of relationships, trust, and communications. The chapter considers these within a complexity theory framework. A discussion of contemporary thought then follows.

The literature review highlights the relevant work which has been done in each section. It is beyond the scope of the thesis to provide a comprehensive review of each of these areas. The focus, therefore, is on how they relate to the sustainability of relationships and how they can be linked together to provide an effective framework to guide this research.

2.1 Definitions and Discussion about Sustainability

There are many definitions of sustainability with most agreeing that sustainability is defined as a way of holding together a relationship (*Macquarie Dictionary* 2003), or a number of relationships. In the marketing literature sustainability is defined as a process by which phenomena such as relationships are kept going or continuing on (Hutt and Speh 1996; Dwyer and Tanner 2002; Ford and IMP Group 2002; Gulati & Oldroyd 2005; Narayanan and Raham 2004). More normative and prescriptive business research focuses on how sustainability should focus on the contributions organizations can make to other organizations and society (Dumpy and Benn 2002).

While the relationship marketing theory in which sustainability has its roots traces its origins to the trust research of Deutsch (1962), this review focuses on contemporary literature that has developed from these original ideas.

At the heart of social relationships is the notion of reciprocity (Argyle 1991). This is reflected in an interfirm perspective where reciprocation is regarded as part of a developmental relationship approach (Gaskill 2001), that is facilitated by continuing relationships which may take different forms. Ford and IMP Group (2002) believes the concept can be extended by considering the development of networks of firms (IMP Group 2008), which evolve through cooperative efforts (Helsen & Kotabe 2004).

The outcomes associated with this development are also extensively discussed in managerially focused literature. For example, there is considerable literature that highlights relational development as being at the heart of business management and seeks ways to facilitate this. (Lee 2004), and (Calatone, Droge & Vickery 1999), believe the emphasis should be on better management of the supply chain ensuring that organizations involved in these relationships are better aligned with each other and able to adapt to changes which may occur. The importance of this meaningful continuation is also reflected in the literature of strategic customer relationship management (Gulati & Oldroyd 2005; Cross, Liedtke, Weiss 2005), which can enhance business ties. (Homburg 2004).

2.2 Evolution and Development of Sustainable Relationships in Marketing

Much of the contemporary literature discusses how relationships can be “sustained” by their participants (Cross, Liedtke & Weiss 2005), so that they “give back” (Czinkota & Ronkainen 2003; Carbone 1999), to the relationships (Stundza 2004; Naude, Turnbull & Leek 1999), and to the wider business ecology in which they reside (i.e. their networks) (Henders 1992; Araujo & Easton 1986; Ford 2002). A range of factors are highlighted as influencing the propensity for sustainable relationships and the likelihood of their occurring.

2.3 Motives and Intentions of Participants

One group of scholars believe it is important to determine the motives and intentions of participants (Groth, Miller and Papassuppa, 2009) through classifying the nature of the buyer/seller relationship (Dwyer & Tanner 2002). Motives and intentions are interpreted as ranging from seeking transactional relationships to collaborative ones with many

relationships existing somewhere between the two (Dwyer and Tanner 2002; Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987; Arndt 1982; McNeil 1980). These researchers believe that investigation into the reasons for these differences in perception and relational value are vital as the motivations of the buyer do not necessarily mirror those of the seller. Moreover, it is the differences and similarities of these that drive relationship effectiveness.

However, the underlying dimensions of the relationships identified differ. Dwyer and Tanner (2002), identify two dimensions in relationships — social and contractual or structural relational factors. Others have identified three areas — series, pooled and mutual inter-dependency relational factors (Thompson 1967; Stabell & Fjeldstad 1988), which result in relational equity (Narver & Slater 1990; Sawhney & Zabin 2002).

For others the research focus has been upon the collaborative efforts between two parties (Palmer 1997, 1998; Anderson & Naurus 1984; Araujo & Easton 1986; Sheth & Parvatiya 1994; Berry, Parasuraman & Zeithamal 1991), that differentiate between the nature of relationships in terms of the social and economic aspects of the relationship. It is in this context (Gefen & de Straub, 2003) that the idea that relationships must also “give back” to ensure continuity is examined, as Hakansson (1982) does in his work on developing stronger business relationships and networks to gain strategic alliances. Davidson (2006), Cannon and Perrault (1999), and Araujo & Easton (1986), similarly consider the process of creating bonds and embeddedness within networks in line with others (Granovetter 1985; Mattsson and Johansson 2006), as a means of continuity. In a slightly more managerial vein Ford (2002) argues that the correct offering is a fundamental part of the process of sustaining relationships. This offering must be able to solve problems and focus not only on the abilities of buyer and seller but also on the actual relationship between these two organizations.

In this research context the focus of the literature has not been primarily concerned with the specific nature of sustainability or what it may achieve for society but with studying the means by which it is achieved and/or the benefits it brings. Sustainability is inferred to be present by the evidence of continuing relationships and the way these relationships are seen to evolve provides insight into its nature.

2.4 The Impact of Social Sciences Literature on Theories of Sustainability

The idea of “sustaining relationships” stems from theories within the social sciences. This is reflected in metaphors such as those used by Levitt (2003), when he observed that an interfirm relationship is akin to the courtship, marriage and possible dissolution processes observed in deep interpersonal relationships. (Dwyer, Schurr & Oh 1987), have also based their relationship development process (model) on a similar way of thinking (Comer & Zirger 1997; Dwyer & Tanner 2002), finding that the marriage metaphor is particularly applicable in analyzing interfirm relationships as it focuses on mutual problem-solving and the deepening of relationships, the implementation of effectiveness and the concept of reinforcing and developing trust (Dwyer & Tanner 2002). The work of Hunt (beginning in 1976), is also important in this area with the commitment trust continuum (Morgan and Hunt 1994), being recognized as another way in which interfirm relationships can be analyzed through the participants’ feelings and actions in the relationship.

Contemporary scholars have extended this area further through research into networks studying interconnected sustainable relational qualities (IMP Group 2002; Ford 2002). Such literature often focuses on the evolving network configurations that create continuing relational value. For example, the Toyota supplier network was tiered so that the organization dealt directly with only a handful of suppliers instead of several thousand (Ford 2002), leading to more efficient and interactive interfirm dealings and cost savings. This is in line with the approaches found in supply chain management research (Narayanan & Raman 2004), and purchasing and negotiation (Weiss & Hugh 2005). Such findings are further reflected in other studies of industry networks such as telecommunications (e.g. Ford 2002). These show similar outcomes despite the complexity of network structure and processes (Ford 2002; Hakansson, Moeller & Harlingen-Kaila 2000; Gummesson 1999).

A related stream of literature considers the relational process through the lens of social relationships using social bonds to underpin the relationship thereby enabling the integration of structural bonds into the relationship process to safeguard the relationship (Dwyer & Tanner 2002; Ghingold & Wilson 1998; Kalkota & Whinston 1997), and

Wald & Castleberry (2000), also support this view through their consideration of the importance of integrating the purchasing and buying process (through effective relationship building) into the sustaining of relationships. The focus of much of this research is evaluative — i.e. ascertaining the extent to which these initiatives and accompanying processes are already in place (Cross, Liedtke & Weiss 2005; Ford 2002; Quayle 2006; Ertel 2004), and identifying opportunities to implement and/or improve them. There is throughout this work some consideration of sustainability as a developmental relationship (Gaskill 2001), that is facilitated by continuing relationships. (Lele 1991; Sachs 1991)

In marketing literature (Alderson 1957, 1965) much of the work has focused on the attitudes and behaviour of individuals which contribute to sustainable development (emerging from Fishbein & Ajzen 1975), rather than on what sustainable development is or how it may be achieved (Mont & Plepys 2003). However, discussion on sustainable relationships would be incomplete *without* consideration of the contribution of management theorists whose focus has differed from the marketing approach. Contemporary management scholars (Markandya, Golub & Strukova 2003; Munro 2002), have considered relational sustainability from an economic, social and environmental perspective, where they largely look at the impact of different kinds of organizations on society (Disendorf 2000). Implicit in this is a consideration of sustainability in terms of the social relationships that both drive development and are a result of it (Dunphy & Benn 2002; Dunphy & Griffith 2003; Dissendorf 2000).

At the heart of these discussions are concerns with the morality of business development and what drives it. Solutions tend to focus on approaches such as new product development (Bohemia 2000), or green marketing (Van Dam & Apeldoorn 1996; de Groot 1994; Kleiner 1991), rather than on the underlying processes of relationship development (Shaff 2003; Sharma 2001, Solomon 1960).

2.5 Outcomes of Sustainability

A diverse range of outcomes emerging from relational sustainability are proposed by scholars from many disciplines, including marketing and management. Fraser (2006), believes the immediate outcome is seen in the better use of resources to sustain a global

society including the relations within it (and including interfirm ones). In contrast Hakansson's (2002), approach reflects the mainstream B2B thinking and focuses mainly on the networking and relational benefits which result from sustainability. Outcomes include improvements in the offering (Ford 2002), to the network and its social bonds as well as the resolution of problems which can strengthen ties between firms and people (Hutt and Speh 2002). In such considerations there is reasonable consensus as to the business efficiency that results from relational sustainability but there is little debate about whether greater societal good is produced by relational sustainability.

In contrast contemporary management scholars (Dunphy & Benn 2002; Dunphy & Griffith 2003), focus on the economic and corporate sustainable advantages that individuals, organizations and societies gain from working together (Diesendorf 2000). In this respect the views of management and some economists have commonality of thought (e.g. Brown et al. 1987; Redclift 1992), with sustainable development being seen as having strong ties with ecodevelopment (Dasmann 1986; Gans, King & Makiw 2006; Heledd 2004; Mitcham 1995).

2.6 The Benefits of Sustainability

2.6.1 Networking Benefits

As mentioned above, the benefits of relationship sustainability extensively considered in the research of the IMP (Industrial Marketing and Purchasing) Group (2002) which highlights the value of emergent networks (Young et al, 2006) resulting from strong interfirm ties. This line of thought has synergy with other research (e.g. Dwyer and Tanner 2002), which believes relationships benefit from taking a multi-process approach to developing organizational ties. This work considers the value of longer lasting interfirm relationships in terms of a union of effectiveness, efficiency and sharing of resources and strategy (Dwyer & Tanner 2002), which can lead to better returns and profits (Hitt, Huskisson & Ireland 2002), and result in more valued relationships between the organizations (Mintzberg 1998; Ohmae 1989; Porter 1990, 1998; Quinn 1992; Corson 1994; Cowles 1994). This supports the strategic and economic benefits of recognizing and developing networks.

2.6.2 Competitive Advantage

Many marketing strategists believe organizations will grow and gain competitive advantage from increasing their interconnectedness (Kotabe, Knapp & Fudge, 1994; Kotabe & Helsen 2004; Porter 1998; Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson 2004; Brown et. al., 1987); Porter 1990). Porter believes this interconnectedness is at the heart of the competitive advantage which gives organizations strategic advantage over their competitors and is one of the main reasons why firms will form strong strategic alliances and friendships with others in organizations. This can be through improvements in the value chain (St John & Harrison 1999; Sivakumar & Wilkinson 2004), the fostering of innovative business practices (Bohemia 2000; Jones & Thomas 2003), and the process of nurturing customers who have a lifetime value (Pepper & Rogers 2004).

2.6.3 Trusting Relationships

Another benefit of sustainability is seen in the process of creating trusting relationships between firms which can reduce the firm's transaction costs and have a positive impact on organizational structure (Davis 1993; Hitt, Ireland & Huskisson, 2004). Thus the existence or belief in trust in an enduring relationship (Nandan 2005) is seen as an outcome and part of a process where the development of trust can bring financial or economic benefit to the relationship (Goodland 1995; de Graf, Musters & ter Keurs 1996; Kleist 2004).

In earlier research on the role of trust (Hosmer 1995), attempted to link sustainability with trust as he believed that people are often optimistic during a joint initiative or economic exchange and that the party awarding its trust relies on an obligation that has been voluntarily accepted by the other side. In other words, a promise (implied or explicit) of working for sustainability creates the conditions necessary for trust and trust creates the conditions necessary for sustainability (Asher 2005; Rowland 1988).

2.6.4 More Effective Communication

Sustainability can also lead to more effective communication in interfirm relationships (and vice versa) (Birch 1993), which allows people to engage in a mutually satisfying fashion (Birch & Glazebrook 2000), and lead to the building of lasting relationships (Belch & Belch 2001). Within the literature of managerial communication Tomlinson (2006), argues that it is possible to develop a continuous process of loop and link between people (Camerata & Barker 1988; Eunson 1994).

Others view technology as playing a part in (e-)communication efficiencies where communication can be personalized between participants (Brannback 1997; Palmer & Griffith 1997). However Daft (2004) argues that communication in an organizational behaviour perspective means that not all communication will be effective and positive. As discussed subsequently, the inclusion of trust to consideration of efficiency allows better consideration of when communication will/will not be effective. Similarly, there is a growing body of marketing researchers, including Ford (2002), who identify communication as being one of the precursors to longevity in relationships and see it as being intrinsically linked and invaluable in promoting longer-term relationships between individuals in a business setting (Belch & Belch 2005; Brannback 1997; Tomlinson 2006; Dubosson-Torbay 2001).

2.6.5 Drawbacks, limitations and problems of sustainability

The discussion of sustainability has become problematic due to the different interpretations of the area and the focus which scholars place such as whether environmental considerations take precedence over other areas (Epstein and Birchard 2000). While others have argued for a more balanced approach to sustainability supporting the need for Corporate social responsibility in organizations (Christmann 2000; Barge 2003; Wood 1991).

However the drawbacks to the discussion are deeper as it is not possible in this report to cover components of sustainability including how a sustainable structure, design, culture and financial performance (Arndt 1982; Bhimani, Franz, Ncube 2009; Newman 2007) can in effect help to create sustainable networks (Epstein and Roy 2005) as this literature review examines the concept of sustainability in terms of interfirm relationships.

This does not mitigate the importance of discussion of the drivers of sustainability or of the importance that such inputs have into business relationships (Daft 2004).

2.7 Interfirm Relationship Theory

2.7.1 Introduction

Research into interfirm relationships has developed with contemporary researchers (Wilkinson, Young & Freitag, 2005; Ford 2002), believing that a central part of understanding relationships is understanding the processes through which interfirm relational develop.

2.7.2 Definitions and Contemporary Discussion

In general terms relationships are defined as a bond between two different people or parties who are very close, have an affinity, an alliance, association, attachment, bond, connection, kinship, link, rapport, relation or tie (*Oxford Dictionary* 2003; *Macquarie Dictionary* 2003). In a business setting Tomlinson (2006), defines relationship as that which has to be established and worked on, and as being something that does not usually happen by chance. In an interpersonal context (Kelley et al. 1983), defines close relationships as those in which people affect each other “frequently, strongly, in diverse ways and over considerable periods of time resulting in interdependence” (Kelley & Thibaut 1978).

Embedded within these various definitions of relationships is the idea that connectedness may have more than one source. According to (Young & Daniel, 2003), among the most likely of these sources in business relationships is the glue of trust. The importance of this cannot be overestimated. It is argued that it is the inherent trust in business relationships which underpins the existence of or belief in loyalty in self and others. (Pepper & Rodgers 2004). Such meaning is also reflected in the work of (Gronroos 1993), who described Relationship Marketing as establishing, maintaining, enhancing and commercializing customer relationships through promise fulfilment

(Gronroos 1990). This is in line with foundation work in trust which highlights the centrality of credibility (Young and Daniel, 2003). Further trust is seen as providing an advantage to customer and supplier (Ford et al. 2002), and reflecting the competence of those participants and enhancing dyadic communication between a firm and its stakeholders (Strauss & Frost 2005; De Groot 1994; De Groot & David 1993; Davidson & Rogers 2006; Larsson et al 1998). This is discussed further in a subsequent section considering theories of trust.

2.7.3 Immediate Outcomes

One of the significant outcomes of interfirm relationships sustaining and growing are the resulting developments which can be made to products and services as well as systems (Ford et al, 2002), which in some cases result in innovative product and service development (Bohemia 2000).

Dwyer and Tanner (2002), have interpreted such outcomes as being linked to the motivations of buyer and seller and the interaction of these, while others judged the success of relationships (Palmer and Griffith, 1997, 1998; Wilson & Vlosky 1977) in terms of collaborative and relational effectiveness (Anderson & Naurus 1984; Araujo & Easton 1986; Sheth & Parvatiyar 1994; Perry & Coote 1994).

A somewhat different but not unrelated approach is reflected in the work of (Berry, Parasuraman & Zeithamal 1991), who classify marketing relationships into three types and use these criteria to judge the outcomes of relationships. They believe there is limited potential for sustained competitive advantage if the primary bond is purely financial, but if a social aspect was added then there is a higher chance of having an outcome with sustained competitive advantage. If the bond is also structural, then the potential for sustained competitive advantage is even greater. This is also highlighted in the work of Blenkhom and Noori (1990), which shows how effective relationships can be when driven by actions of powerful larger companies such as Toyota which develop stronger networks, strength and competitive advantage for all participants.

2.7.4 *Benefits*

Common to much of the above discussion is the high degree of likelihood that interfirm relationships can be beneficial to all parties involved through the value added as a result of their interactions. This is exhibited in relational performance in a number of ways. (Olsen 1997; Wynn 1996; Stoelhurst & von Raaif 2002). It can be seen through improvements in the offering and service (Ford et al. 2002), as well as in the level of commitment shared between participants (Hunt & Morgan 1994; Dwyer & Tanner 2002; Dwyer, Oh & Schurr 1987). These in turn generate benefits such as entry into further business relationships, networks, and strategic alliances, as well as assisting in capturing global markets and creating loyalty (Hakansson 1982; Cannon & Perrault Jr. 1999; Chandon, & Philippe 1997; Rosenau 2003; Stalk, Evans & Shulman 1988).

2.7.5 Drawbacks. Limitations and problems

Finally one of the drawbacks to this discussion has been that the focused discussion and integration of several streams of literature has made it difficult to substantially discuss all relevant areas. In particular the ‘context’ of relationships which business marketing researchers have linked to the provision of value adding relationships (Anderson, Hakansson & Johanssen 1990) is considered primarily in an implicit way. Context is seen as providing the basis for organizations and the individuals within them who drive the relationships to make judgments about those relationships. Context can also be a motivator. The nature of interfirm relationships existing and sustaining in a given context (Epstein and Roy 2005) is what makes them valuable (or not) (Coff 1999).

2.8 Communications

2.8.1 Introduction

Communication has already been discussed in passing. The following section considers it further as it is argued here (in line with the thinking of others) that this is a central part of the process of sustainability. There has been increasing interest in business communications in recent years (Tomlinson 2007; Strauss & Frost 2005; Belch & Belch 2001; Delia 1987), which researchers have linked to the growing prominence of interfirm relationship studies (IMP Group 2002) and the increase in e-business and e-communications (Strauss & Frost 2005; Tomlinson 2007).

2.8.2 Nature and Role of Communication

Communication stems from the Latin word *communicare*, meaning to ‘have in common’ (*Macquarie Dictionary* 2003). Thus communication is seen as occurring when information is passed, ideas are exchanged and there is a process of establishing a commonness or oneness of thought between sender and receiver (Belch & Belch 2001; Schram 1955; Work and Robert 1989; Cohen 1994; Everett 1994). The cultural differences of participants are often central to determining the effectiveness of interfirm communication upon relational sustainability (Reynolds & Valentine 2004), as is the dynamism of the setting in which communication takes place (Peters and Fletcher 2004; Palmer & Griffith 1997; Windschuttle & Elliot 1998; Samli & Bahn 1992) and the affects of the participants who are the critical nodes in communication networks (Peters and Fletcher 2004, Moemeka 1998) .

Contemporary thought is further impacted upon by the development of technology-specific communication models which address the changes brought about by a computer mediated environment (Hoffmann and Novak 1996; Wheeler 2000). For example, Brannback (1997), highlights the changes represented and effects of these models and questions the validity of earlier approaches to communication (e.g. Mohan, McGregor & Strano 1997; Griffin 1985).

There has been limited consideration of the adaptive structuration theory (Rice 1984) which stems from an autopoietic approach or organicism (Whiteside & Wixon 1988; Peters & Fletcher, 2004) (discussed subsequently). This links with the process-oriented approach of some interfirm relationship marketing research (IMP Group 2002), and more dynamic models of buyer-seller interaction (Ford & Hakansson, 2006; Peters & Fletcher, 2004; Hakansson & Snehota 1995).

There is a group of authors who focus on the immediate outcomes stemming from communication. Within this approach is the view that effective interfirm communication provides immediate insight into and facilitates functioning of more dynamic business settings (Bovee 2006; Dwyer and Tanner 2002). This differs from the focus of the IMP Group as represented by Ford (2002) who consider the longer term

role of communication and discuss the ways in which it functions to sustain business relationships. This is represented in similar terms to discussions of the development of social bonds (Perry, Cavaye & Coote 2002).

Others focus more on communication quality as an outcome of relationships (Tomlinson 2006; Bohemia 2000), in conjunction with other factors such as technology. Combined these factors are presented as leading to more timely and cost effective communication (Strauss 2003; Bean, Boles & Cano 2003; Archer & Yuan 2000; Eisenhardt 1992; Kotabe, Miller & Fudge 1994).

2.8.3 Benefits

Key benefits presented as emerging from interfirm communication include improved dialogue and a more cooperative approach to discussion (Williams & Hazer 1989), which can improve negotiation (Mohan, McGregor & Strano 1997; Mastenbroek 1996; Lewin 1946) as well as enhanced communication within a network (Peters & Fletcher 2004; Miles & Snow 1992) and help to improve organisational knowledge and competence (Orlikowski & Yates 2002; Peters & Fletcher 2004; Dann & Dann 2004; Belch & Belch 2001; Bovee and Thill 2006; McGuire 1978).

2.8.4 Interrelation of Processes of Communication to Trust and Sustainability

Communications has been linked with trust in interfirm relational research (IMP Group 2002; Denize & Young 2007) with both seen as part of the process within which firms journey towards sustainability. Many social science researchers have explored these interactions (Thompson 1967; Crosby, Evans & Cowles, 1990; Coulter 2007) through interfirm cooperative studies (Crosby, Evans & Cowles, 1990; Morgan & Hunt 1994) considering the role of communication and trust in the fulfillment of expectations and goals (Perdue, Davidio & Gurtman 2000; Kaiser 2003; Lewis & Slade 2000; Hutt & Speh 1996). Another group of researchers focus on the overall effect of communication and trust in adding value to the relationship (Wikstrom 1996; Beckett-Camarata, Camarata 2009; Peters & Fletcher 2004). In this vein authors speculate on the ways in which a communication culture will deepen the relationship (Vandenbosch & Ginzberg 1996; Wikstrom 1996; Kayworth & Leidner 2002), provided there are structures which

are conducive to such an approach (Tsai et al. 2004), and will contribute to the process of sustaining marketing relationships (Van De Velk, Tress & Tress 2002).

The connection between communication and relationship building (Gronroos 1993; El-Ansary & Stern 1972) has become more central to study of relationship functioning. Communication is found to encourage participative decision-making, the exercising of power, and the encouragement of commitment and loyalty (Mohr and Nevin 1990). The communication elements embedded in relational exchange (Lambe, Spekmann & Hunt 2000; Everett & Jamal 2004; Golemiewski & McConkie 2002) and collaborative efforts are also related to successful product design and collaborative effort (Bohemia 2000).

2.9 Theories of Trust

2.9.1 Introduction

There is a plethora of literature that highlights trust's centrality in relationship functioning (Rempel, Hiller & Cocieva 2000), continuance (Pepper & Rogers 2004) and development (Anthos & Gabarro 1978). Much work comments on the lack of a consistent definition of trust (Mishra 1996) despite a recognition by many researchers that it is Deutsch's work in social psychology (1958) which provides the foundation for today's conceptualizations of trust (Rousseau & Sitkin 1998; Burt 1993; Rousseau & Sitkin 1998). Therefore, this grounds the discussion that follows.

2.9.2 Definitions of Trust and Discussion of Contemporary Literature

Deutsch (1958), defined trust as arising when a person encounters a situation and perceives there to be an ambiguous path to follow in which the outcome, being contingent on the action of another person, could be either positive or negative. The situation is further complicated because the negative impact of a bad result is greater than the positive impact of a good result (Golbeck & Hendler 2006). However, this does not define what trust is, rather it indicates when it may occur. This reflects the fundamental issue within trust research — that relatively few definitions consider the nature of trust (Young et al. 2006).

The foundation work of social psychology is reflected in the trust definitions of leading writers such as Hunt and Morgan (1994), and Moorman & Zaltman (1993). To some degree this work also incorporates the work of personality researchers who define trust as a state (Cowles 2006) in which “a generalized expectancy is held by an individual that the word of another ...can be relied on” (Rotter 1967, p.651). From this approach also emerges contemporary conceptualizations of trust (Peppers & Rogers 2004; Moorman & Zaltman 1993) which include confidence in reliability and integrity.

However, there are researchers who argue that it is necessary to define the nature of trust more explicitly rather than limiting it to “confidence in” a number of characteristics (e.g. Young et al., 2006; Young & Wilkinson 1989; McAllister 1995). This work also highlights the multi-dimensional nature of trust and the need to move beyond rational calculation of the likelihood of particular outcomes to a more encompassing conceptualization and operationalization of trust. Utilizing the work of emotions theories (e.g. DeRivera 1977, 1984) work by Young and Daniel (2003), and Young and Albaum (2003), include in their measures consideration of its affective nature rather than limiting attention to the cognitive/calculative nature of trust.

Other recent research argues the need to add the environment of business to considerations of trust. They argue this is necessary as the business environment has changed in fundamental ways. These authors voice concern about the need to build swift trust among organizations due to technology and the speed with which business is taking place (Strauss & Frost, 2005; Blomqvist & Ståhle 1997), and seek understanding of how swift trust differs from traditional forms. Some argue that this is not trust in the traditional sense, arguing that the social and emotional aspects of collaborative relationships are excluded in these settings and require further research (e.g. Luthans 2002; Strauss and Frost 2005). Some authors argue that emerging trust is a more brittle or fragile form of trust and that it is increasing both in frequency and fragility in relationships (e.g. it becomes increasingly fragile as it is “amplified” in online settings). It also is characterized as being more easily lost than traditional forms of trust (Kleist 2004).

This is in line with the enduring argument that an understanding of trust is contingent upon considering mistrust (Solomon 1960). Current literature recognizes there may be

difficulty within interfirm situations in developing trust and explore ways of addressing this. For example, Narayanan and Raman (2004), propose the possibility of developing trust through the use of intermediaries. This can be particularly useful in intercultural situations where an intermediary may be considered to be the norm and who is a trusted person through which business can be conducted.

The idea of commitment as both an outcome and driver of trust and relationships has been examined in both marketing literature (Young 1993; 2003) and organizational literature. Much of the earlier work which considered commitment as embedded in trust stemmed from the foundational work of Becker (1960), where commitment was seen as being a pivotal part of trust.

This has continued with scholars viewing commitment as part trust within a relationship, which in turn is seen as underpinning most strategic partnerships (IMP Group 2002). However, the relationship between trust and commitment remains ambiguous. One seminal work implies that if two partners trust each other sufficiently they will be loyal and committed to a relationship and at the same time that commitment will generate trust (Morgan & Hunt 1994). Commonsense leads to a conclusion that accords with the stance of this thesis that the commitment-trust relationship is a continuing process with commitment building trust and vice versa (Denize & Young 2007).

2.9.3 Outcomes

One of the main effects of trust in business relationships is that of reducing uncertainty (Rempel & Cociestra, 2000), according to the interrelatedness of the parties involved (Laschinger et al. 2001) argue that people prefer to work with those that they trust and will only work with people they do not trust if there is no other choice. This is due to the psychological costs of having to deal with ongoing uncertainty (Daft 2004; Mukherji, Francis & Mukherji 2009).

Other outcomes discussed include positive outcomes to do with both the individual, e.g. improvements in psychological health and development (Asch 1952; Babour 1983; Erikson, 1959; Young & Daniel 2003), and organization, e.g. the development of even

stronger client-supplier relationships, (Hanson, 2006; Hawes, Mast & Swan 2003; Schurr & Ozone 1985). In both contexts, trust can also have a positive effect on communications where credibility exists (Daft 2004; Grisaffe 2001; Lazelere & Huston 1991).

2.10 Complexity Theory

2.10.1 Introduction

There is a growing body of research addressing complexity (Rosenhead & Mingers 2001) with the original interest from scholars from computational and mathematical backgrounds being augmented by interest in the social sciences and business (Santa Fe Institute 2007). Its focus is on the emergence and evolution of systems (Hawking 2000). Such an approach can help scholars to explain the forces impacting on a business world undergoing constant change. It is seen as an appropriate framework in which to place the interacting, evolving emotional processes of a relationship and complement the current focus on relational qualities of business relationships (as has been discussed in previous sections).

Researchers in technology and management (Daft 2004) disciplines increasingly integrate complexity into their research (GoldSpink & Kay2005; Daft 2004; Rosenhead & Mingers 2001; Maturana & Vareela 1980). However, there have been limited contributions from marketing scholars (Wilkinson and Young 2000, 2005) in contributing to this discussion.

Other recent contributions (Hansen 2007) recognise complexity in terms of its impact on supply chain management, a key part of interfirm relationships. However while the scale of research is growing and broadening it is still limited and there is need for additional contribution.

2.10.2 Definitions, Complexity Theory and Autopesis

Complexity theory is defined as being composed of several interconnected and involved parts representing a complex web of ideas (Rosenhead & Mingers 2001; Luhmann

1990, 1995; Zeleny 1991; Wheatley 1993; Stacey 1992, 1996; Merry & Kassavan, 1995).

Complex Adaptive Systems have been identified and defined as having properties and mechanisms which are common to all CAS (Holland 1995). These are aggregations as the system allows groups to form. Another property is non-linearity which refers to the system evolving in a specifically non-linear and non-trivial way, invalidating extrapolation by simple means. This is followed by flows in which the system allows the transfer and transformation of resources and information and diversity where the members of the system behave differently from one another, often leading to the system property of robustness. (Holland 1995).

The discussion of the meaning of CAS also requires explanation of autogenesis and duplication. Autogenesis is defined as “processes interlaced in the specific form of a network of productions of components which realizing the network that produced them constitute it as a unity.” (Maturana & Varela 1980, p. 80). More contemporary research defines it as providing a base for understanding the features of micro-level agents which can make up the social systems of people (Goldspink & Kay 2005). However, it does not in itself create the social system. Duplication is related to self-replication in this context and is defined as the replication of these processes either through copying or through a network (Maturana & Varela 1980).

Of particular interest here, and in line with earlier managerial research, is utilization of complexity in regard to self-production. In particular, this area of complexity theory incorporates ideas of “autogenesis”, which studies self-replicating systems (Stuart 1990; Maturana & Varela 1980), which extend a network and the unity of that group (Resnick & Varian 1977).

The concept (Adler, Gough & Bray 2005) has been utilized extensively in the study of biology and addresses the social processes which are a necessary consequence of a living systems’ biology. This has been used to consider how people relate to society and the environment in which they live (Maturana & Varela 1980). In a similar vein, there has also been some consideration of the similarity of business and biological systems

(Wilkinson, Young & Freyer. 2005). Throughout, the focus is on interconnection and feedback between relational elements and the use of complexity theory to explain these.

It is therefore argued that complexity can be used as the organizing framework for the study of relationships through time, i.e. the sustaining processes. This is particularly relevant as it allows scholars to study the change which takes place in interfirm relationships as some develop into sustainable relationships (Dwyer & Tanner 2002). This aspect is not necessarily covered so competently by other theories.

The evolution of business relationships has been examined when studying the nature of relationship development (IMP Group 2002), but much of this work has considered evolution as pre-specified stages along the lines of life cycle models (e.g. Dwyer et al. 1987). It does not consider how the relationship and its participants act to enable its effective continuity.

A complexity framework provides an approach which allows examination of the changing interactions of communications, trust, the relationship itself and the ways these act to determine the direction the relationship takes. The study of recreating processes that characterize the formation and reformation of interfirm relationships is best facilitated within a framework which recognizes that interrelatedness among firms continuously changes.

Considering the characteristics of complex adaptive systems (CAS) provides insight into the nature of evolving business relationships and networks (Clippenger 1999). However one of the surprising outcomes of CAS can be due to the dynamic properties of complex systems — specifically disaggregated decision-making and feedback loops, which makes it difficult to forecast or predict a result with any certainty (Sante Fe Institute, 2007).

However, there are others who recognize that it is also possible that CAS exist with quasi-stable properties (Goldspink & Kay 2005; Stewart 1990; Kauffmann & McCready 1995). This allows researchers to consider the rich interconnected nature of evolving relationships and the facilitation of self-replication (Wilkinson & Young 2005). This assumes that there is order inside the CAS (Kauffman & McCready 1995).

However, a characteristic of CAS is that stability can shift to instability where an unusual occurrence happens and in doing so can shift the system from order to chaos before order is or is not restored (Stuart 1990).

Chaos in this context refers to chaos theory which is defined as a set of theories which relate to dynamic systems, stemming from studies in science and climatic conditions (Macquarie 2003). The concept refers to the unpredictable nature of the system due to tiny variations in the conditions of its natural state (Stuart 1990; Macquarie 2003). This may or may not return a system to previous processes of replication; instead a new set of replication processes and/or a new replication outcome is likely to result.

Within the sciences literature this “new” outcome is considered by many to be entirely due to the evolution of autopoietic systems (Lemos & Cardoso 2003; Coleman 1994; Smith, Dean & Holmes 1997; Taylor 2007; Rosenhead 2005). In this context antipoietic system relates to autopoiesis and is defined as a system which challenges or may differ from the former system which is composed of complex or many interrelated parts (Maturana and Varela 1980)

Other aspects of analysis of CAS relevant to this research include the concept of structural drift, where a change in the nervous system leads to structural coupling so that behaviour can reoccur and become the norm (Maturana & Varela 1980). This concept could be linked to the benefits of autopoiesis and duplication as seen in business networks and relationships and relation to management decisions and adaptive behavior (Daft 2004). Contemporary researchers such as Ford et al. (2002) believe complexity is applicable to interfirm marketing situations where there is a need to be “close, complex or longterm”. (Ford et al. 2002 p. 7).

2.10.2.1 *Drawbacks, Limitations of the Discussion about Complexity*

The major drawback in analyzing literature about complexity theory was the limited research which has been undertaken in marketing. Most of the contributions in business literature have been made by management researchers (e.g. Maturana and Varela, 1980) who have based their studies on the earlier efforts of mathematics and biological sciences.

Despite this, the concept of complexity theory as an integrating framework for providing an explanation for interfirm relationships has been useful. It captures the multiplicity of factors and their “complex” interacting nature that characterize business relationships. This model then can be used to integrate the many-faceted actions of communication and episodes of trust that are at the heart of the research to be presented subsequently.

2.10.3 *Conclusion*

The review of contemporary literature on the key thematic area of sustaining interfirm relationships through trust and communication has shown these areas to be interrelated. The review of complexity theory as a mechanism for understanding such processes is gaining momentum in research.

This literature review has demonstrated that relationships and sets of relationships (networks) can be conceptualized as containing processes such as trust and communication that guide and direct them (de Wet 2008).

These processes depend on the interaction of the parties of the relationships, i.e. communication and trust are co-produced (Wilkinson & Young 2005), so that the processes act and interact to produce the process of self-replication that can be conceptualized as “sustaining” the relationship, by which is meant the relationship is effectively remaking itself.

The dynamic and multifaceted environment that characterizes the business sphere as well as the other relationships to which any given one is connected (i.e. Networks)

continuously evolves and provides shocks to the relationship to which both parties must adapt.

Effective sustaining processes have the capability to do this and contain processes that will in some circumstances return a relationship to a previous “attractor” and in others will move to a new equilibrium (i.e. a different way of co-managing the relationship processes and outcomes).

Thus complexity and the study of complex adaptive systems is helpful in providing a broader approach to understanding how these processes may evolve and replicate through networks.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

3. Introduction

A two-stage mixed method research design has been implemented for this thesis. The first stage is comprised of quantitative analysis of an information database on interfirm relationships. The second stage consists of analysis of a set of in-depth interviews with informants regarding interfirm relationships.

3.1. Justification of the Mixed Methodology Used

The selection of mixed methodology stems from the need to understand interfirm relationships in a broader-based setting (Sinkovics, Penz & Ghauri 2005). This view is supported by researchers who believe that integrating qualitative analysis with quantitative analysis can be more informative (Creswell 2008; Ghauri & Gronhaug; Andreasen 1995), and enables a better capture of multidimensional phenomena in data collection and analysis (Young, et al. 2003). Such an approach is seen to be relevant where it is necessary for the research to take a broader view (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002), and where the research undertaken focuses on understanding process (Maxwell 1997).

A method is needed that addresses the key areas of this research. This includes consideration of

- the multiple processes of sustainability of relationships, (recognizing that there are different views of sustainability) (Epstein and Roy 2004)
- the role that communications models play (Hoffmann and Novak 1996),
- the processes of relational marketing (IMP Group 2002), and
- the complexity properties of business transactions (Maturana and Varela 1980)
- As well as the interactions between these aspects.

The methodology seeks to understand both the objective and subjective (Armstrong, 1979) nature of informants' understanding of business relationships. No single method effectively addresses both therefore a combination of sources that will derive facts as to the behaviours occurring (objective) and the possible reasons for this (subjective

attitudes and beliefs (Creswell, 2008)) is used. The importance of investigating attitudes and beliefs is important in relationship-oriented research.

Resource constraints also dictate method choice. The cross sectional data base available drove the choice of method, i.e. what method could be best combined with it. The research issues might suggest use of longitudinal study however this was beyond the resources available. Similarly, observation incorporating some ethnography elements might have been useful but this form of data collection requires substantial time and is not guaranteed to provide the insights needed. In addition obtaining permission to observe and or film participants would be extremely difficult to obtain due to the confidentiality of business discussions, legal implications as well as privacy and the complex process of obtaining permission from different stakeholder groups.

Instead, the direct questioning and discussion of depth interviews was indicated to provide the best available synergies because the ambiguities arising from the quantitative research and the imperfect match of data base content and research goals could be addressed in this way. Thus the combination of methods uses creates effective triangulation possibilities. (Abbott 2001).

This combination is line with the recommended criteria for selection of the mixed methodology (Abusabha & Woelfel 2003), which include: “when all data has both an objective and a subjective component the researcher requires cross-validation of the results the researcher seeks to cancel out, somewhat, the corresponding weaknesses associated with pure qualitative and quantitative approaches” (Abusabha & Woelfel 2003, p. 569).

The order of these phases research also was driven by resources available. Order can be critical and there is a recommendation that this decisions should be based on the quantity of previous research and ensuing level of knowledge (Churchill 1999; Prochaska & DiClemente 1983; Young 1993; Albaum, Evangelista & Medina 1998). Therefore, the decision was made to commence with quantitative analysis because there was considerable depth of information available through access to the database that was part of a larger program of research (see Young & Wilkinson 1997) and because the database could be explored to provide direction for subsequent research. This was

followed by qualitative analysis (Chenail, 1994) which can provide richer textual insights. This is in line with (Rocco et al. 2003), who contend that mixed methods research allows for the exploratory process beginning with empirical evidence of the particular process and leads to a level of abstracting/theorizing/generalizing and the confirmatory process of hypothesis testing of theories (Rocco et al. 2003; Steckler et al. 1992).

3.2 Stage One: Quantitative Study

The Emotions database was the centre of the quantitative research. This is part of a larger research programme which enable the research of this phase to be considered in a more substantive way than would otherwise have been possible. The protocols in place (this is the fifth phase of 25 year research programme) ensured quality and previous findings (Young and Wilkinson 1989, 1994, Business Dancing, in press) could guide the direction of the analysis and design of subsequent phases. While the information available was collected independent of this research's goals, it was comprehensive (in breadth of issues considered. The large number of respondents whose data was included was far beyond the scale of research that could have been conducted – given time and cost constraints.

The IRRP emotions database consists of answers to several hundred questions about the nature of 363 interfirm relationships. The informants had taken part in structured interviews which focused on a single good or bad relationship that they had with a person or persons within a different organization.

There was considerable attention given to the emotions experienced within this focal relationship. Informants were sourced using the interviewer's personal network of contacts from a wide range of industries including manufacturing and service industries. This was because the purpose of the research was to gain insights into general business relationships rather than to focus on a specific industry.

The interviews were conducted by students as part of their studies of business to business marketing. The interviews were personal interviews with students using their

own contacts to recruit, they were trained in how to conduct interview, they were monitored and 10% of responses were checked to ensure interviews had been conducted properly.

3. 2 .1 *Questionnaire Design*

The study was part of the Interfirm Relations Research Programme (IRRP) which was designed to explore the effectiveness of relationships between firms which trade with one another. The programme focused on studying the importance of the personal relationships that business people form with their counterparts in other firms and how these impacted on the way firms conduct business. The questionnaire used in this part of the study emerged from a program of research consisting of in-depth interviews, a large scale test of the instrument (n=100) and two large-scale surveys (reported by Young & Wilkinson 1989, 1997; Wong 2008). This research uses the data from the third large survey, the instruments used including structured questions that seek an overview of a focal relationship and its atmosphere as well as a bank of items seeking an emotional profile of the relationships (including 80 items which operationalize DeRivera's (1984) structural theory of emotions.

The questionnaire initially assists informants in selecting a relationship on which to focus. The systematic selection of relationships was critical to the research design to ensure a diverse sample. This is particularly important as the sample of informants was a convenience sample based on students' personal networks. However, the sample of relationships was systematically selected from a larger evoked set. Informants were asked to select the relationship after first thinking of the relationships they had with other firms where they had interacted regularly with a particular person or persons in that firm. They were asked to consider only relationships where there was some ongoing contact and relationships where there had been an ongoing contact which had either ended or was less intense than previously.

Next informants were asked to think of several relationships they felt to be typical of a good and/or enjoyable relationship and to think of several relationships which they felt to be typical of a poor and/or not enjoyable relationship. The interviewer first selected whether a good or poor relationship would be the discussion focus based on the year of birth of the informant (even or odd numbered). If they were unable to think of a

relationship that fell into the selected group then the other group was the focus. The interviewer was also given a protocol for choosing which poor or good relationships should be selected from those indicated. To ensure there was no confusion informants were asked to confirm whether they would be discussing a good or poor relationship or discussing a relationship of another type (and if so what type of relationship it would be).

The format of the instrument consisted of several sections. The first part examined the general relationship and the people in it. This section looked at whether the informant felt the relationship was good or bad, how long the informant had known the person and the gender of the respondent. The second section looked at general trends in the relationship. This included whether the informant felt the relationship was increasing or decreasing, the type of business or industry the informant was involved in as well as whether it was goods or services.

The next section examined the feelings the informants had when they interacted with the person with whom they most often interacted in the focal relationships. This included both positive and negative feelings. It also included details of their intentions in the relationship. (The questionnaire is in Appendix 4.1)

3.2.2 Measurement Development

Central to the research aims is the exploration of the nature of and relationships between drivers of sustainability — as discussed the focus is on relational change, communication and trust. Multiple item measures were developed such as multi-item measures of trust and relational sustainability and change based on the process described by Churchill (1979) and Carmines and Zeller (1989).

Items used to develop multi-item measures were selected based on face validity, previous findings of the IRRP research programme (in particular Young & Wilkinson 1997; Young & Albaum 2003). Following the process recommended by Churchill (1979), first descriptive statistics including mean and standard deviation were calculated for all selected items. Second, correlations of all items for each category of measure were calculated. Third, correlations were examined and only items which were found to have statistically significant correlations with most other items in the group were selected for inclusion into the multi-item measure.

Fourth, exploratory factor analysis was undertaken on the selected items, with the coefficient alpha used to indicate the commonality of the set of items developed to capture a construct. Individual items which substantially lowered the alpha were excluded. Fifth, because the coefficient Alpha assumes unidimensionality in the measurement items but does not provide a check of this, (Frendendall, Hopkins & Christo, 2005) various procedures were used to check and improve the reliability and validity of the resulting measurement scales. These included assessing the faced validity of items remaining and the internal consistency of each scale being examined via factor analysis to ensure all items loaded on one dimension. (Hair, Black & Babin, 1998; Malhotra 1988; Weitzmann & Miles 2000)

3.3 Stage Two — Qualitative Study

The second stage of the research methodology, the qualitative study, consisted of two parts. First, preliminary in-depth interviews were undertaken in 2003 with two informants. In-depth interviews were chosen as a technique which could penetrate beneath the surface and probe the feelings and motives of the informants. This method of data collection was then adopted for the remaining six interviews in 2006 to explore the richer information that these informants could provide.

Informants were sourced from the candidate's business/social networks, enabling selection of informants who were very willing to cooperate and had great interest in assisting with the research. Each interview was held at a location selected by the informant.

The selection of the informants was made after considering the need to include people who worked in different industries and held positions of differing responsibility. Other selection criteria included how accessible the person made themselves in terms of being contactable, and responding in a timely fashion.

Thus informants were both male and female, with their ages ranging from late 20s to 40s. Informants also possessed different experience and as the data shows had different perceptions of what constituted interfirm relationships.

There were few surprises in terms of the interviews themselves. Perhaps this is due to the experience of the informants in dealing with people and also because most were briefed about the nature of the discussion in pre interview discussions by telephone.

Only one informant seemed nervous and needed reassurance and warming up by discussing general business before settling down and discussing the areas highlighted in the questionnaire. While another provided rather guided and shallow answers with little substance. Upon reflection the student thinks the selection process could be improved by sourcing interviewees from a wider range of informants representing a more diverse range of business and in different locations.

While any differences in responses from the informants can be explained through the use of management theory (Daft 2004) while identifies personality traits, environmental factors, and perception as factors which lead people to view issues differently. In addition the effectiveness of communication (Daft 2004) and the person's position in an organization will also affect their response.

3.3.1 Questionnaire Design

The design of the questionnaire was based on the contents of the questionnaire for the quantitative study (to enable meaningful comparison) as well as information obtained in the pre-interviews for the in-depth study. Using an interview template (see Appendix 5.1) informants were asked several open-ended questions designed to facilitate conversation and comment by the informant. The scope of the research also left room for the informants to make further comment about any issue they felt was relevant.

To facilitate general discussion and selecting a focal interview to discuss, informants were asked prior to the interview to think about interfirm relationships they had experienced or were currently involved with, and to think about why these may or may not have been sustainable (Hjelm 1997). In the opening part of the interview, informants were asked general questions about their general views on, and experiences of, interfirm relationships before focusing on a particular relationship. The general questions included the consideration of feelings of trust, communications, relational sustainability, as well as commitment and the different factors involved in being in a

relationship. These were followed by questions about good and bad relationships and what experiences they had had. In discussion of the focal interview they were asked to describe the relationship and its history and were prompted in particular about the nature and role of trust, relational sustainability and communications.

3.3.2 Justification for the Use of Thematic Analysis within Qualitative Analysis

Interviews were recorded and semi-transcribed (detailed notes taken while listening to the tapes several times). These notes were then analyzed in two main ways — by compiling a summary based on content and using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected as a flexible and proven method of doing this as it has been used in psychology and marketing for many years (Braun & Clark 2006).

In thematic analysis the data is grouped and analyzed based on meaning rather than in terms of frequencies of words or concepts (Boyatzis 1998; Joffe & Yardley 2004). The outcome is the grouping of a wider set of themes which allows researchers to integrate qualitative and quantitative analysis so that the focus of the research is not on deductivist or inductivist reasoning (CR) but on the broader findings of the research — in line with the purpose of the qualitative stage of research for this thesis. In addition thematic analysis is effective as a way of reporting process and evolution (Attride-Sterling 2001), which is central to the complexity framework that underpins the research (Kelle 2004).

CHAPTER FOUR — QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the quantitative study using the methodology detailed in chapter three. First, a description of the informants from the database is presented. secondly the main findings of the analysis are shown, and thirdly the process of developing individual measures is shown.

The respondents focused on their perception of a particular interfirm relationship which they classified as being either good (61%) or poor (39%). (As per the discussion in chapter 3, the type of relationship to be discussed was preselected and the split should have been 50-50. The lower percentage of poor relationships indicates that 11% of informants who asked to report on a poor relationship were not involved in a poor relationship. This reflects previous findings, for example, Young and Wilkinson (1997). The individuals responding to the survey ranged from 19 to 65 years of age, with a mean age of 38.5 years. Sixty seven per cent of informants were male and 33% were female.

The length of the focal relationship between the respondent's organization and FirmX (so called because the name of the other firm was not asked for in the interview) was between 0 to 99 years. The high value of 99 years (there was only one) is possibly a misinterpretation by the informant (but could conceivably reflect the time the organizations were involved in a relationship) while the zero value represents relationships which were less than 12 months old. The mean relationship length was 8.4 years.

The nature of the relationships with respect to what was traded also showed considerable diversity. In slightly more than half of the focal relationships 54.2% consisted of relationships in which products were bought/sold, while the remainder worked in services marketing or both product and services. Slightly more than half, 56 %, of respondents, acted as the buyer or client in the relationship and the remainder were the seller.

The person with whom the respondent had primary contact (Person X) ranged from 19 to 65 years of age, with a similar mean age to the respondent of 38.5 years. As is the

case for respondents, Person X was far more likely to be male than female with 72.6% of primary contacts in the other firm that were the focus of discussion being male. A range of marketing functions are performed by the Firm X in which Person X “resided”, with 19.5% being manufacturers/producers, 20.5% being wholesalers/distributors, 29.4% being service suppliers and 30.6% retailers.

4.1 Development of Measures

This section presents the measures developed of communication, trust, relationships and sustainability.

4.2 Communication

Only a single item of communication frequency is available from the data base. Communication was highlighted as important to the development of sustainable relationships in chapter 2. The characteristics of the relationship show that most informants communicated with Person X two (46%) to three (30%) times a week, with very few reporting that they communicated five (5%) to six (2%) times a week. Fifteen per cent communicated once a week or less. The frequency of communication was about the same for good versus poor relationships with those in good relationships having a mean frequency of 2.3 times a week while those reporting on a poor relationship have a mean of 2.4.

4.3 Trust

The survey instrument included a substantial number of items that could be developed into multi-item measures of trust. The following sections present the development of measures, using the same items and approach reported in Young and Albaum (2003). The measures include positive attitudes towards Firm X and its representative(s), positive trust-related feelings towards Person X (conceptualised to be reflections of trust (see Young & Albaum 2003, Young 2006 for further discussion) and positive, longer-term feelings towards Person X (conceptualised to be reflections of commitment or a long-term trust). Young and Albaum also developed a measure of suspicion and ambivalent feelings towards Person X (conceptualised to reflect distrust (see Deutsch

1958) – which might give insights into trust. However, this was thought (Bowling & Ebrahim 2005) to be beyond the scope of this research.

4.3.1 Levels of Reported Trust

The level of trust reported in the focal relationships varied as evidenced by responses to a number of items that directly measure trust and trustworthiness.

The statement “I trust Person X” had a mean of 4.0 (where 1= strongly disagree and 6= strongly agree) and a variance of 2.9. Trust was even higher in good relationships with a mean of 5.0 and variance of 1.2. However, informants were not likely to believe they behaved in a trustworthy manner with the mean of 1.4 and the variance of .24.

Similarly informants were more likely to believe that Person X trusted them (mean= 4.5) than that they behaved in a trustworthy way (mean= 1.7).

However, as might be expected the relationship classification and reported trust were associated. The statement “I trust Person X” had a mean of 5.0 (versus 4.0 for all relationships) for good relationships and informants had a greater belief that they behaved in a trustworthy way (mean=4.54 versus 4.54 for all relationships).

4.3.2 Attitudinal Measure of Trust

The items used by Young and Albaum (2003) and Young and Wilkinson (1997) to develop their scale of attitudinal trust have been utilised to develop this measure of trust as discussed below. Table 4.1 reports the means for each item, factor loadings, variance explained and alpha for the resulting measure.

Table One: Scale for Attitudinal trust

N (for factor analysis=331)	Mean for total sample	Mean for good rels	Factor loading for one factor solution	Includ ed in scale
I have confidence in the accuracy of the information I get from PERSON X	4.41	5.23	.769	Yes
I have confidence in the fairness and honesty of PERSON X.	4.16	4.97	.811	Yes
I can always rely on being informed early enough by PERSON X in areas of importance to my firm.	4.37	5.08	.730	Yes
The relationship between PERSON X and me is characterised by: - close and continuous personal contacts - numerous good personal relationships between the individuals of the two firms. - confidence in each other -high levels of commitment to the relationship				
	4.73	5.03	.230	No
	2.42	2.19	.391	No
	3.01	2.78	.807	Yes
	2.73	2.25	.537	Yes
I trust PERSON X	4.04	5.00	.793	Yes
PERSON X has the desire and ability to maintain a good trading relationship with me	3.97	4.27	.607	Yes
Alpha for included items				.676
Total variance explained by factor			.539	

The levels of trust are moderate (around the mid-point of the scale) and as expected the means for the whole sample are lower than when only good relationships are considered. For example the item “I trust Person X” has a mean of 4.0, while for the informants characterising a “good relationship” the mean is 5.0. The statements asking respondents to characterize the relationship are the exception to this pattern.. Three of the four of these have much lower means for the whole sample and the difference between the whole sample and good relationships is not very different for all four.

Exploratory factor analysis was undertaken on the items shown in Table 4.1 and showed a three dimension solution – with both the Scree plot and eigenvalues indicating three components. However, the resulting solution was not useful. The items which directly expressed “trust” or similar attitudes loaded on the first dimension. However, the item measuring the type of relationship as well as items such as “I behave in a trustworthy manner towards Person X” and the characteristics of relationships such as “feeling a high level of commitment” loaded on multiple dimensions. The second factor had only one item loading on it and the third factor had no items unambiguously loading on it. Therefore, a one factor solution was run and the items loading on this were used in the resulting scale.

In the development of all multiple-item measures the following decision rules applied. The items were included in the scale if an item loaded more than 0.50 because this loading gives significance levels of less than 0.001 (Burt and Banks 1947). If there were multiple factors (and thus multiple scales) items were excluded if they loaded more than 0.40 on another item or if the difference between the highest loading on factor and the next highest loading of the item on another factor was greater than or equal to 0.20. (In line with Young & Wilkinson 1997; Young & Albaum 2003).

The factor loadings items for a one factor solution are reported in Table 1. Seven of the nine items had loadings above 0.5 and were included in the scale including items such as “I trust Person X”, “I have confidence in information from Person X” and “I have confidence in the fairness and honesty of Person X” (Denize & Young 2007). The results differ slightly from the Young and Albaum (2003) results for measuring trust. Excluded from this measure are two items which are characteristics of relationships, “close contacts” and “good personal relationships” which were included in the earlier research.

4.3.3 Emotional Measure of Trust

The second measure of trust follows the approach of Young and Albaum (2003) in developing emotional measures of trust. The same processes described in the previous section were followed. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Scale for Emotional Trust

N=331	Mean for total sample	Mean for good rels	Factor Loading	Included in scale
Liking	3.35	4.17	.708	Yes
Acceptance	3.40	3.89	.568	Yes
Admiration	2.75	3.48	.690	Yes
Esteem	2.98	3.69	.708	Yes
Respect	3.78	4.69	.755	Yes
Appreciation	3.36	4.19	.788	Yes
Gratitude	2.91	3.58	.627	Yes
Faith	3.24	4.01	.762	Yes
Alpha for included items				.936
Total Variance explained by Factor			0.693	

The level of trust as indicated by emotions associated with trust (according to Young 1993) was not particularly high for items measuring feelings which the informant has towards Person X (1= strongly disagree this emotion is experienced to 6 = strongly agree) and although they appear to be higher for good relationships they are still not high (only near the mid-point) for many of the emotions, which was unexpected. For example, the mean for “faith” is 3.2 for all relationships but is higher for good relationships with a mean of 4.0. For “respect” there is a higher mean of 3.8 for all relationships than for “faith”, and a mean of 4.7 for good relationships.

Exploratory factor analysis was undertaken on the items shown in Table 4.2 and showed a three dimension solution – with both the scree plot and eigenvalues showing three components. However, the solution was not interpretable and so only one factor was extracted. All items loaded on the factor and were included in the resulting scale.

4.3.4 Long-Term Trust Measure

A measure of long term trust and/or commitment was also developed by Young and Albaum (2003) which is replicated below.

Table 3 Scale for Commitment

N=324	Mean for total sample	Mean for good rels	Factor Loading	Included in scale
Security	3.09	3.77	.998	YES
Confidence	1.08	1.09	.518	YES
Satisfaction	1.57	1.84	.908	YES
Pride	1.04	1.10	.414	NO
Alpha for included items				.598
Total Variance explained by Factor			.490	

The scale for long-term trust/commitment was calculated using the same items as did the Young and Albaum (2003) research on trust measures. While the eigenvalues and scree plot showed there were two factors, the small number of items and cross loadings led to a single factor solution.

The mean for these items in all relationships are again lower than for the good relationships. In contrast to Young and Albaum (2003) factor analysis showed only three items with loadings that are sufficiently high, with two: “security” and “satisfaction” loading very highly. One item “pride” was excluded as it loaded below 0.5. The alpha is slightly low but when rounded is just at what is often considered to be the minimum acceptable, 0.60.

While Young and Albaum (2003) considered this as a measure of trust, for the purposes of this research this measure is considered as a possible aspect of sustainability in line with the literature review where commitment was shown to be important in sustainability .

4.4 Relationships

A number of items provided insight into the quality, character and changing nature of the focal relationship.

4.4.1 Quality

The quality of the informant's relationship with Person X was measured in several different ways.

4.4.2. Satisfaction in the Relationship

The quality of the relationship is thought to be indicated (Savendstedt 2005) through the "satisfaction" which informants experience in working with Person X. As there was no direct measure of satisfaction available, the item "enjoyability of meeting with Person X" was used to measure this. The results for all relationships was more than half (59.5%) of informants finding their meetings with Person X to be enjoyable, 16.9% being ambivalent and 22% feeling negative as they did not enjoy these meetings. When only good relationships were considered the proportions changed somewhat with 59.5% thinking the relationships enjoyable and 16.9% and 23% being ambivalent and negative respectively.

A second measure of quality or satisfaction was via the view of informants about the relative quality of their relationships with Person X (compared to the other relationships). Nearly one fifth were positive about the focal relationship believing it to be among the best or the best relationship they had experienced (19.1%), while the majority considered it to be satisfactory or better (64.5%). Of the remaining, 13.8% found it to be unsatisfactory with 2.5% indicating it was the worst relationship they had ever had. For good relationships 66.7% thought the relationship among the best, 22.1% thought it satisfactory and 1.2% thought it among the worst.

4.4.3 Changeability between Informant and Person X

Information about relational quality in terms of the changing nature of the relationships was also obtained. Over half of the respondents indicated that the relationship with Person X was consistent (56.5%), 25.1% thought it was improving and 18.4% thought it was deteriorating. For the good relationships, 29.6% of respondents thought the relationship was improving, less than one percent thought it consistent and 64.5% thought it was deteriorating.

A second item of changeability considered the evolving nature of the relationships. This showed that respondents believed the focal relationship was either improving (34%) or ,

consistent (62%) with relatively few (8) 4% believing it was deteriorating. For good relationships the proportions were rather different at 67%, 20.8% and 12.2% respectively.

The third measure of changeability looked at it in terms of an increase or increase in business between the informant's firm and the organisation which Person X represented. Overall the 58% of respondents saw business as increasing, 5% saw as consistent and 37% found it to be deteriorating. For good relationships the proportions were somewhat different at 46.8%, 36.2% and 17% respectively.

4.4.4 Scale of Relationships

The scale for the character of relationships was developed based on the research of Young (1993) emerging from the work of Reve (1981). The scale consists of 10 items with half the items considering negative characteristics and half the positive characteristics of relationships (1= relationship is characterised to a very small extent by the attribute and 9 = the relationship is characterised to a very large extent by the attribute. The items are reported in Table 4.

Table 4 - Scale of Relationships

N=320	Mean for total sample	Mean for good rels	Factor 1 Loading	Includ ed in positiv e scale	Factor 2 Load -ing	Include in negativ
Coordination	5.98	7.00	.636	YES	.225	
Coalition of interests	5.72	6.57	.494	NO	.234	
Respectfulness	6.07	7.43	.787	YES	.222	
Mutual Confidence	6.07	7.61	.833	YES	.232	
Companionship	3.75	4.88	.759	YES	.631	
Crossness/anger	2.36	1.07	.802		.735	YES
Dissension	3.02	1.92	.624		.722	YES
Inconsistency	2.72	1.58	.663		.784	YES
Emotional outbursts	2.07	1.21	.719		.836	YES
Unreasonable Demands	2.36	1.19	.701		.775	YES
Alpha for included items			.790		.892	
Total variance explained by factor			.640		.699	

The items dealing with the positive character of the relationships tend to have high means and these are higher still for good relationships throughout. For example, good relationships have a mean of 7.0 for coordination while the sample as a whole has a mean of 5.98 as indicated in Table 4. However negative characteristics showed different attributes, on average they described the relationship poorly (with means ranging from 2.36 to 3.02). For good relationships these negative attributes had lower means than was the case for all relationships. For example, “emotional outbursts”, has a mean of 1.2 for good relationships and 2.1 for all relationships.

A two factor solution was run to see if items split along positive and negative lines. As this was roughly the case the items were analyzed separately (to correspond with the objective of ascertaining how relational qualities impact upon sustainability). However, the most interpretability emerged with a one factor solution and the reliability analysis showed strong internal consistency with an alpha of 0.878.

4.5 Sustainability

As already indicated the measures for relational sustainability include the third trust measure, the scale of commitment, which is modelled on the work of Young and Albaum (2003), the development of which was presented previously but is again indicated in Table 5.

Table 5- Sustainability Scale One (for Commitment) (Previously presented in section 4.2.2,3)

N=324	Mean for total sample	Mean for good rels	Factor Loading	Included in scale
Security	3.09	3.77	.998	YES
Confidence	1.08	1.09	.518	YES
Satisfaction	1.57	1.84	.908	YES
Pride	1.04	1.10	.414	NO
Alpha for included items				.598
Total Variance explained by Factor			.490	

The second measure of sustainability focuses on the cooperative activities that are argued to continually “remake” the relationship. This measure has been modelled on earlier work by Young (1993) and Young and Wilkinson (1997) on cooperation in interfirm relationships. Results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 – Sustainability Scale 2 - Scale of Sustainable Attitudes and Beliefs

N=350	Mean for total sample	Mean for good rels	Factor Loading	Include d in scale
We work hard to maintain a good working relationship with Firm X	4.36	4.76	.555	YES
Our firm has and demonstrates a sincere interest in Firm X's success	3.40	4.47	.994	YES
Our firm is interested in making Firm X' s operations profitable	4.11	5.07	.892	YES
Our firm behaves in a trustworthy manner towards firm X	3.94	4.55	.705	YES
Our firm searches for solutions to any joint problems we may have	4.16	5.13	.257	NO
Our firm has a genuine interest in Firm X's continued success	3.96	5.13	.670	YES
Our firm has the desire and ability to maintain a good trading relationship with Firm X	5.03	4.71	.727	YES
Our firm works well as a team with Firm X	3.68	5.31	.424	NO
Alpha for included items				.608
Total variance for factor			.653	

The original Young (1993) scale consisted of seven items dealing with issues such as teamwork and seeking solutions. It also included items addressing various forms of cooperation. The mean range for the items depicting sustainability in terms of cooperation was 3.4 to 5.03, while the mean range for “good relationships” was 4.5 to 5.3.

Factor analysis showed eigenvalues with six components above one while the scree plot indicated three components. However, there was considerable cross loading so a one factor solution was adopted with five items loading on the factor. The resulting Alpha of these items was 0.773.

4.6 Examination of Correlations between the Scales of Measurement Developed

The purpose of this section is to consider the relationships between the various measures as they relate to sustainability. These measures include communication, attitudinal trust, emotional trust, enjoyment satisfaction, relational satisfaction, change 1, change 2, change 3, relational characteristics, sustainability emotions, sustainability cooperation. For sustainable cooperation originally two measures were suggested through the data, one for positive items and the other for negative items. However due to the focus of the research in examining sustaining of interfirm relationships, the negative items will not be considered in this analysis.

Table 7 – Table of Correlations of Measures developed

	com	A-trst	E-trst	Enjo y satis f	Rel satis	Chan gel	Chg2	Chg3	Rel char	Susta in emot	Sust ain coop
com mun	1.0										
Attit trust	-.118*	1.0									
Emot ion trust	.100	.629**	1.0								
Enjo y Satisf	-.80	.386**	.688**	1.0							
Rel Satis	.068* *	.706**	-.690	.436**	1.0						

			**								
Chng 1	.147* *	-.563 **	-.405 **	-.214 **	.498 **	1.0					
Chng 2	.150* *	.425 **	-.455 **	-.263 **	.497 **	.381* ***	1.0				
Chng 3	.136* *	.674 **	.331 **	-.396 **	.815 **	.485* *	.506* *	1.0			
Rel Char	.176* *	.366 **	.340 **	-.199 **	.335 **	.416* *	.349* *	.317	1.0		
Susta in emot	-.220* *	.728 **	.565 **	.295 **	.640 **	.458* *	.331	-.606* *	-.403* *	1.0	
Susta in coop	.139* *	.934 **	.597 **	.383 **	.654 **	.568* *	.359* *	-.619* *	.380* *	.775* *	1.0

** = significance at .01, *=significance at .05

The associations within the groups of measures show reasonable correlations. For example between the two trust scales, emotional and attitudinal trust the correlation is .629. Similarly between the two satisfaction measures the correlation is .436 between the three change measures the correlations are .498, .381 and .506 and for the measures of sustainability the correlation is .380. These correlations are of a magnitude that indicates conceptual similarity but also discriminant validity. However it is worth noting that in each instance there are higher correlations with other measures. For example emotion-trust is most highly correlated with relational satisfaction (.690).

Collectively the trust measures, change measures and quality measures correlate with sustainability in varying degrees. Table 7 shows that the trust measures correlate most highly with sustainability - .934 and .597 for the cooperative sustainability measure and .728 and .565 the emotion-based sustainability measure. The change measures are lower - .568, .359 and .619 for the cooperative sustainability measure and .458, .331 and .606 the emotion-based sustainability. Slightly higher is the correlation of the relational quality measure with sustainability. Communication measures are lowest (-.220 and .118) and this is also the case throughout with communication frequency not correlating highly with the other measure of Table 7.

This pattern of results tells us that the nature of sustainability is largely associated with feelings and attitudes of trust within the relationship. Changes in the relationship and enjoyment of meeting and satisfaction achieved through this interaction are secondary to these emotions and attitudes which underpin the relationship.

4.6.1 Regression Analysis

Further explanation of the process of sustainability is sought via the use of regression analysis. The selection of stepwise regression is based on its use in explaining the interconnected processes of interfirm relationships in the past (e.g. Young & Wilkinson 1997)

Analysis was undertaken using the various measures of sustainability as the dependent variable. The first model uses cooperation-orientated sustainability as the dependant variable and all other measures developed in this chapter as independent variables. The results of the regression analysis show that all scales were excluded except for attitudinal trust in this model. While the results for the second model showed all variables being excluded except for attitudinal trust and relational satisfaction. The second model differs from the first in that it finds sustainability to be closely related to both trust and relational quality, whereas the first model shows the link between sustainability and trust only.

The next regression analysis tested sustainability again, this time using the emotion/commitment scale of sustainability. The results reported in Table 8 show that all scales were excluded except emotional trust in the first model. While the second model showed emotional trust and relationships to be the only scales to be included, the third model showed emotional trust, relationships and the informant's satisfaction having significant betas.

Table 8- Regression Analysis

N=342			
Model 1	Standardized Coefficient	Tvalue	Sig
Sustainability-cooperation as dependant variable			
(constant)	.993	14.408	.000
Attrust		47.820	.000
Model 2		12.041	.000
Attrust	.896	38.597	.000
Conbusx	-.067	-2.896	.004
Sustainability-commitment as dependent variable			
Model 1			
(constant)		4.949	.000
emotrust	.712	18.706	.000
Model 2			
(constant)		-1.469	.143
Emotrust	.687	18.438	.000
Relationships	.179	4.808	.000
Model 3			
(constant)		-3.000	.003
Emotrust	.799	15.026	.000
Relationships	.156	4.149	.000
conbusx	.155	2.931	.004

The results of the regression analysis reflect the correlation analysis of the previous section and show that sustainability is related to attitudinal and/or emotional trust most closely, followed by relational qualities and satisfaction. The measure of sustainability used makes a difference. When sustainability is conceptualized as an activity set (cooperation) then attitude/activity-oriented trust is most associated with it. When sustainability is conceptualized as commitment and measured as an emotion set, then emotions-based trust dominates. This is not surprising. In commitment-oriented sustainability, relational quality (which is largely a measure of a generalized state) also comes in. Each gives slightly different insights into the processes of sustainability. Perhaps most importantly this pattern of results highlights the perils of injudicious comparisons of results across studies with different measurements of sustainability. As

measurement approach appears to be quite a substantial indicator, careful conceptualization and operationalization of sustainability and the factors it is associated with would appear to be key.

CHAPTER FIVE — TOWARDS A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROCESSES OF SUSTAINABILITY

5 Introduction to Qualitative Research Findings

This chapter extends the analysis of the previous chapter by considering the processes of relationship sustainability and evolution as discussed in the series of in-depth interviews undertaken with six informants. In addition, the interviews explore the factors that contribute to sustainability and the connections and interrelationships among (Schemerhorn 2004) those factors that sustain interfirm relationships. In particular, insight is sought as to the ways relationships are facilitated through feelings of trust and communication and thus evolve. The process that occurs is recognized as complex and emergent.

The interviews were conducted from 2003 to 2007 with additional material collected late 2008 and 2009 to supplement the existing interviews.

5.1 The Methodology

As discussed in chapter 3, the method involved the conducting of a series of in-depth interviews from 2003 to 2008 (see chapter 3 for further details) which was then thematically analyzed. The interviews provided greater insights than had been anticipated. (Caterall 1998) Interviews went beyond the scheduled times at informants' request and most participants expressed a desire to continue the dialogue further. Several phone conversations and subsequent face-to-face conversations were held with those interested informants following the in-depth interviews. All this subsequently collected material is included in the analysis, the results of which are reported in the following sections.

5.2 Descriptions of Informants

The six informants were of varied backgrounds but had substantial business experience in common. Both males and females were interviewed, most aged in their 30s and 40s.

The first informant was a female named Anne who was aged in her mid-40s. She described herself as a warm and friendly person to deal with in business who enjoyed working with her clients on marketing services strategy and providing advice. She has a business degree and significant industry experience.

The second informant Dan was aged in his mid-30s. He described himself as being courteous, polite and fairly reserved. He was the managing director of a large multimedia company at the age of 30, and has been involved in marketing for about 10 years. He is wary of becoming too involved with clients and tries to distance himself from his clients through the imposition of some business and personal boundaries. He likes to multi-task and study as well. His current area of study was law.

The third informant Rebecca is in her 40s and has approximately 20 years working experience in services marketing in a client service role. She is focused and goal-orientated. She takes great pride in keeping fit and has business and career goals as well as personal financial aims.

The fourth informant Mark is aged in his early 50s, is an accountant and has more than 30 years experience in auditing and tax.

The fifth informant Brendan is aged in his mid-30s. He has spent approximately eight years working in financial services and spends most of his time at the desk dealing with clients on the phone.

The six informant John is aged in his late 40s and has more than 20 years experience in a services marketing capacity. He is well read, reserved and hardworking. He finds it easy to network and gets bored quite easily.

5.3 Data Collection

The interviews were conducted by the author who recorded the interviews by writing down the informants' responses which were later typed up. This method of recording interviews was chosen due to her industry experience in writing down interviews in the

media. However, two of the interviews were recorded and transcribed by a colleague. The notes and transcribed interviews are included as an appendix (See appendix 5.1).

The process of analysis used involved developing a set of open-ended questions about the informant's interfirm relationships. These questions were developed after consideration of the key areas of the literature review and the questionnaire used to collect the quantitative data. Thus the interview guide focused on the areas of sustaining interfirm relationships through communications and trust (See Appendix 2 for a copy of the interview guide).

The informants were not directly questioned about complexity (although this was mentioned by one respondent) but were questioned about their experiences of relationship management, change and evolution.

The interviews were analyzed manually rather than through qualitative software such as NVivo or Leximancer. As the focus was on process and direct experiences rather than semantics or thematic relationships it was thought that computer-aided analysis would add little.

5.4 Overview of Findings

5.4.1 Process of Relationships

The process of sustaining relationships described by informants requires commitment by the parties involved in the relationships over time. This is important as it reflects much of the findings of the literature review. Informants have described the important components of sustaining relationships as being the sharing of resources and ideas as well as the ability to communicate and trust another person in a different organization which builds as the relationship grows.

5.4.2 Sustaining Relationships

The informants' belief in the importance of sustaining interfirm relationships emerged very clearly from the interviews. This was evidenced by most informants making comments about the importance of "sustaining" or "nurturing" or "working to keep

good” their key client relationships. It is also worth noting that such comments emerged near the beginning of the interview and with little or no prompting. When prompted and asked to discuss the particulars of sustainability (as happened about 10 minutes into the interview) all informants spoke of this at great length with little probing needed.

5.4.3 Trust in the Relationship

Trust was also seen as being an important part of the relationships, with informants using the word “trust” without being prompted. References to trust occurred after the informants had settled into the interview, approximately 15 to 20 minutes into the discussions. Positive feelings such as “commitment” and “loyalty” were also used by informants in discussing trusting relationships. A typical example of this is the comments of one informant who saw trust as being embedded in the sustaining and retention of relationships. In turn this linked to trust and effective communication.

5.4.4 Trust Links to Communication

Most informants believed that communication could enhance a relationship if undertaken in the client’s preferred way and at a frequency that is right for that relationship. For most it was important to meet face-to-face if possible and to be in regular contact through phone or email.

However, the relationships with clients were bounded. Most respondents limited their social contact with their clients. Clients were not unconditionally liked and/or trusted. The reasons for these boundaries varied. Some informants felt that negative feelings of distrust, lack of loyalty and non-reciprocal arrangements eroded the relationship. This was evidenced through informants feeling that certain clients would not commit to future work with them even though they, the service provider, had proven themselves.

One informant expressed the view that their feelings of commitment were often not reciprocated and that he and his staff gave far more to the relationship than they received which left him feeling quite dissatisfied.

5.4.5 Limited Comments about Complexity

Although complexity theory was not directly referred to in the interviews, the “complexity” of interfirm relationships was seen as being an appropriate way to explain the intricacies of interfirm relationships by one informant and indirectly referred to by others. These references did not precisely reflect the forces which guide complex adaptive systems but did include a number of these elements.

The informant who focused most on complexity was able to articulate the details of his interfirm relationships and expressed the many aspects of his relationships that required more than a cursory explanation. Of the remaining informants two others implied that their relationships were complex arrangements. This was expressed through using words such as “lots of different elements” or “there’s a lot to it, and it’s hard to explain”. However, there were other informants who saw their work as being straightforward and simple to discuss.

5.5 Detailed Textual Analysis

The following sections provide deeper insight into informants’ discourse. The analysis provides more detail and rich, contextual insights to augment the basic findings presented above.

5.5.1 Descriptions of the Process of Relationship Sustaining and Evolving

Sustaining is explained in the literature review as being a way of holding together a relationship (*Macquarie Dictionary* 2003) or a number of relationships and as a process is defined as a way to keep phenomena such as relationships going or continuing while not deteriorating (Hutt & Speh 2004; Dwyer & Tanner 2002; Ford 2002; Gulati & Oldroyd 2005; Narayanan & Raham 2004). The management literature further contributes ideas of providing support and giving back as part of sustaining (Dunphy and Griffith 2003).

Most informants believed sustaining relationships to be very important despite the differences in their descriptions of the processes of relationship sustaining and evolving. For example one informant described the process of sustain relationships as “exceeding

customer expectations” while another described it as “meeting the requirements of both parties”.

Most informants felt the primary goal was not merely sustaining but that it was important to work towards building long-lasting relationships which could be sustained over time. However, they recounted contextual factors that made this difficult or impossible. This was typified by one informant who spoke about the difficulty he faced in working in an industry where two years was considered to be a long time for a relationship to exist. In such an environment clients were essentially fickle and always looking for something new. He found some of these clients to be extremely enthusiastic at the beginning of the relationship but found their interest waned over time as the newness of a project or working together, essentially the novelty of something new, wore off. He also found that clients were not shy about borrowing his ideas and even managing projects themselves in preference to outsourcing to his organization.

The process of sustaining and building relationships was often reported to be asymmetric, with some informants reporting that they were much more likely to provide substantial inputs to the process than were their clients. Two informants stated that the effort they put into an interfirm relationship was often not reciprocated, a factor which they found frustrating and disappointing as they wanted longer-term business relationships.

5.5.2 Relationship Continuation

Informants spoke more directly and comfortably about relationships continuing rather than their sustaining. (The latter was seen by informants — in line with management literature — to incorporate more than ensuring survival). The factors which are important for a relationship to continue include some commitment by the different parties, a feeling that the other person can be relied upon and will keep his or her word. Some informants voiced views that integrity and feelings of loyalty were very important to them as was the need for people to be dependable and reliable (however it was not always clear whether this was referring to the continuation or sustaining of relationships).

As already mentioned, relationships with clients were often perceived to be asymmetric. This created additional problems with respect to the demonstration of attributes that contributed to the likelihood of continuation and/or sustaining. Asymmetry could be so profound that clients did not perceive the relationship development activities being undertaken by the provider. One informant explained that the effort which he and his team placed into a relationship was unfortunately not always recognized or reciprocated by the other party, making it hard for the provider to deepen the relationship. For relationships to be sustained all parties involved not only had to benefit to a certain degree, they needed to recognize they were doing so — and that could be the most difficult part of relationship sustaining.

5.5.3 Relationship Evolution

Relationship evolution was discussed by informants in both negative and positive terms. Negative discussion often focused around lack of control. There was recognition that relationships do change through time due to environmental factors such as the economy or social change over which informants had no direct control but not surprisingly informants preferred to be in control of their relationships' destinies.

The culture or norms of certain service provision settings also played a substantial role. In the provision of creative services informants reported that supplier change was often seen as an important source of creativity. One informant in particular reported at length how unsettling and worrying it was that his clients often changed suppliers because they felt their businesses depended on presenting new concepts and events.

This kind of client felt it was better to tap into a number of different sources either by changing or running a number of suppliers at the same time. This occurred even if they were happy with the existing suppliers. This lack of commitment from clients and, more particularly, the disconnection between good performance by the supplier and client loyalty had led to the informant questioning whether it was worth putting in any extra effort. It is possible that lack of client commitment may cause the quality of the relationships involved to deteriorate as the provider puts less input into those relationships and the client responds to this lesser effort.

However, while a strong stream of pessimism ran through many of the interviews, it was not universal. Another informant discussed in depth relationships that had evolved and become “predictable” as a result of the informant consistently delivering service that was above average and by completing extra work without charging more or commenting on it. The informant was rewarded by an increase in work from those clients. It was sometimes the case that he was asked if he would like extra work rather than having to compete in the open market.

His efforts had also resulted in improved relations with people in the firms he dealt with. He found that he was privy to some of the decisions in business which would take place which enhanced his capacity to deliver good service.

Informants also commented on the nature of change (as distinct from its quality). For some informants this was continuous and smooth, and tended to take place where relationships had been in place for several years. Change tended to be perceived as discontinuous and negative where informants felt the other party needed (new) ideas all the time and were often changing business partners resulting in a disjointed, unpredictable and unreliable relationship.

Most informants preferred gradual change unless unpredictable change was very much in their favor. Gradual change was characterized by an incremental increase in quantity and complexity of work offered to the provider as each party proved their reliability and worth to the other. In contrast discontinuous relationships could suddenly deepen with a large amount of work suddenly provided that could subsequently dissolve.

Not surprisingly, informants generally preferred more continuous change but accepted that this was not always possible. Coping with the unexpected and more general change was often part of their relationship management strategies. For example, one informant managed change by allowing some time each week to deal with unexpected matters. He did not make it known to clients that he had this extra time available unless it was absolutely imperative. This ensured the allotted time did not get subsumed into managing routine matters. In this way he could be assured of satisfying client needs as well as his own.

5.5.4 Drivers and Outcomes of Relationship-Sustaining Activities

Unprompted, informants expressed views that the drivers of relationship sustaining were feelings of trust and respect for the relationship itself and for the other person with whom they dealt. This was confirmed via more directed, follow-up questioning. This was seen as their best possible assurance that relational outcomes would be positive with the informant and the other person committed to relational success which would be reflected in their business dealings.

The means by which this occurred varied substantially as did the reasons for using particular approaches. This was at least partly idiosyncratic, depending on the relational setting (industry and service provided) and the personalities of the individuals involved. For example, one informant recalled “the client wanted to have a good time in all their business dealings and referred to us as his business friends”. Using this insight the informant and his colleagues provided sound advice but augmented this by ensuring that the client “enjoyed himself at meetings”.

For another informant a strong sense of ethics and doing what was right motivated him to perform well when auditing clients and assessing their businesses. However, he was aware that the outcome was not always welcomed, particularly if his analysis resulted in a client having to pay more tax or improve their controls and systems. Long term he believed that doing the right thing was most important in sustaining the relationship and no doubt this was bolstered by the legal and professional requirements associated with the context of this particular relationship.

For most informants relationship inputs such as trust were evaluated in terms of the economic benefits they returned. However, this was not always the case. One informant in particular took a longer-term view and commented that he tended to concentrate on the relationship as a means to increasing the chances that the outcome would be positive. He believed that he did not have to worry too much about retaining clients if he did sound work rather than continuously worrying about the bottom line.

5.5.5 Trust

As already mentioned, trust was seen as being very important in the business relationship by all informants. In all interviews trust was mentioned several times by informants without prompting. Their characterizations of what constituted trust were in line with the literature on trust. Some referred to trusting behavior and believed it was important to earn and retain trust through showing that they were reliable, committed and could fulfill the expectations of the other person. Others believed trust to be a feeling that grew over time as both they and the other party proved themselves to be reliable.

Informants placed great importance on trust in a relationship, with some believing a business relationship did not exist if trust was absent. However, one informant's comment "that you trust them about as much as they trust you" verged on being negative and this was in line with other views expressed — he was quite dismissive of his clients. Another informant believed that often "politics" undermined a trusting relationship and that trust only existed as far the relationship provided an advantage to all the parties involved.

5.5.6 Communication

Like trust, communication was mentioned many times by informants. Good quality communication was seen as driver of good relationships and could be used to improve them.

However, informants varied in their more precise interpretation of the nature and role of communication. Some felt it was an integral part of sustaining relationship with these informants believing that both the quality of communicating and interpreting information communicated played a vital role, i.e. misinterpreted communication could have a negative effect on the relationship. Another informant saw communication as emerging from relationships effectively sustaining themselves through joint activities.

Often the nature and role of communication was considered in specific contexts. For example, one IT-oriented informant thought communication quality was enhanced through technology. He indicated this occurred through the informant's organization and client organizations sharing resources to improve communications online and

through video streamed conferences. Another way in which he saw communications enhancing relationships was through networking systems which he had helped to design.

5.5.7 Relationship between Trust and Communication

Several informants discussed trust and communication together and indicated they were seen as inextricably linked. In these discussions, more open communications were linked to an outcome of people trusting other parties in the business relationship, so that the two were seen to impact upon each other. The relationship between trust and communication was also seen as two-way by some informants. Trust and communication were seen to jointly help relationship sustaining as they both served to inform the different people involved about the relationship and in this way added some value.

The mode of communication, trust and relationship building were also linked. One informant believed a central part of relationship building was to discover how clients liked to communicate with him. In one case he recalls a shy client who disliked face-to-face meetings. To improve communications they reduced the number of meetings and increased phone contact and reports which the client preferred. This worked well and resulted in a much improved relationship.

Trust and communication were also indirectly linked in informants' minds via discussions of credibility. The literature of credibility was not considered in depth in the literature review. However, there are a number of writers who have highlighted its importance. Young (1993), for example notes:

(C)redibility sometimes replaces predictability in discussions of trust because the credibility is specifically concerned with communication of intentions. An individual is believed to be credible if they do as they say they will or convey information accurately (Kirchmeyer 1993; Rotter 1971; Schlenker, Helm & Tedeschi 1973). Therefore, it is argued, it is possible to anticipate their future behaviour and thus to trust them.

In these in-depth interviews credibility and trust were also linked; informants saw these as the joint indicators of commitment from their business partners.

5.5.8 Dysfunctional and Negative Relationship Drivers: Negative Feelings and Poor Communication, Downward Spirals

In addition to positive drivers, informants identified dysfunctional and negative relationship drivers. These were characterized as those things that caused negative feelings towards and from others involved in the relationship. For one informant this occurred when he had worked very hard on an account and was sent a chocolate frog as a “thank you” from a client which he found very trivial. He recalls feeling a little insulted and identified this as an example of poor communication. For the same informant working hard on most accounts did not always give him the returns he hoped for in terms of developing stronger relationships and often it was at this point in a relationship that he experienced negative feelings and felt the relationship was on a downward spiral.

Generally informants did not like coercive tactics or other parties using overt power tactics in the relationship as they believed this was detrimental to sustaining the relationship. For example one informant did not like other parties implying that litigation could be an outcome if the relationship did not progress the way they wanted it to.

5.5.9 Relationships as Complex Adaptive Systems.

It has already been pointed out that “complex” and “complexity theory” are different but that they indicate many similar things. Thus the use of the term “complex” is likely to indicate some attributes of complexity in relationships and their evolution. As previously indicated, only one informant used the expression “complex” to describe his business relationships. He thought it was the appropriate term to use to describe the many factors which affected his interactions with clients. He talked of compliance, regulations, different agendas and interests and time-frames in this context. He commented that communication played an integral role in the process and he was

extremely careful in managing it as he was concerned that if he revealed too much there could be legal ramifications.

The same informant also discussed establishing or building trust as something that added to the complexity of relationships because he had to be careful about divulging information as he was concerned about issues of confidentiality and third party involvement. He was also concerned about legal issues and found it difficult to manage a group of clients with conflicting deadlines.

He found the work onerous and was burdened by the responsibility of the job and the possibility that litigation could result if a wrong decision was made. He felt that this made him tense and stressed and unable to foster better relations. Thus “complex” relationships were seen as being problematic at times.

Other informants were ambivalent about the complexity of relationships. One informant spoke of putting aside personal preferences and making decisions which were in the best interests of a client he worked with and for his organization. He had been forced to examine his conscience regarding this when in a particular relationship he realized his was not the best organization to supply the client.

Due to the fact that key people liked him and respected his versatility in the organization he had been awarded the contract when there was another party who had also proven their worth and was, he believed, better suited. He initially dealt with this by saying that his alternative was much more vulnerable than the informant was as the alternative organization only specialized in the client’s particular (and current) area of need where the informant and his organization were far more versatile in their offerings (as also discussed by Ford et al., 2002).

To resolve this perceived conflict, he withdrew from the contract taking care not to offend anyone, but still maintained healthy relations with the organization. He felt this course of action had kept his company’s integrity intact as well as his own personal integrity. While he acknowledged that he had given away a contract of considerable value and that his actions could have been interpreted as disinterest in the client, he felt

that he knew the client well enough to take the risk. Within a week he had been awarded a contract in another area by that client.

5.6 Conclusion

Complex adaptive systems are characterized by interconnecting parts which form a complex web (Goldspink & Kay 2005). These interviews indicate that these interactions make an important contribution to relationship sustainability and add to its understanding (in line with Ford et al., 2002).

This was not always perceived by informants. Only one informant directly perceived his business relationships in this way. That informant discussed how involved his work really was once he went below the surface of it as he tried to satisfy many different groups of stakeholders and at the same time adhere to rigorous internal standards and external regulations.

For the other informants complexity was referred to indirectly and was conceived of more in terms of the tradeoffs involved with trying to work with different clients at the same time and also in understanding how other people liked to work with them. As already mentioned, for one informant this resulted in less face-to-face meetings with a particular client who was socially awkward and expressed the opinion that many meetings were a waste of time.

The context of the relationship appears to be a key indicator of its complexity. Indirectly informants considered the nature of their business and the way it impacted on relationships (though it was often taken for granted) but contrasting the simplicity of this view of services marketing with tax auditing shows that some interfirm relationships are more complex than others due to the industry.

Other influencing factors are the nature of the organizations, the people involved and their motivation. For example, for some informants relationships are kept simple and less involved because they take a distant, more superficial interest in their work.

Overall, analysis of the interviews indicate that while relationships are often complex, few informants could see the intricacies of such arrangements, or the many layers of the relationship. A possible exception was the understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of trust. This was a topic which informants needed little encouragement to discuss at length and in the course of those discussions it became apparent that they could see the multiplicity of ways in which it underpinned their interfirm connections. However, the value of in-depth interviews in part lies in the possibilities for the analyst to interpret the meaning of the informants' discourse rather than merely reporting their conversation. These interviews did allow further complexity, in particular the importance of the interaction of trust and communication as key drivers of relationship sustaining to emerge.

CHAPTER SIX — RESEARCH INTEGRATION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

6 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to integrate the research presented in this report. This will be done through comparing the qualitative and quantitative findings as a validation device, and considering the synergies that arise by amalgamating them.

The thesis concludes with consideration of the overall contribution of the research and the extent (Bowling & Ebrahim 2005) to which research objectives have been met in this report. This is followed by the consideration of the limitations of the research and the impact of these limitations on the results emerging from this. Finally, this section considers further/future research to be done which will advance the understanding of relationship sustainability.

6.1 Bringing the Empirical Research Together

There are both sufficient overlaps in the findings of the two strands of research to provide some cross-validation and additional insights that emerge by considering them together.

In both the quantitative and qualitative research informants confirmed the importance of sustaining relationships. From the qualitative research findings this is evidenced by informants using terms such as “lasting” relationships and “preferring longer term relationships”, as well as their willingness to work harder in and for a particular relationship. Relational stability and growth are seen as both goals and part of the process of ensuring quality within a sustaining relationship.

Such outcomes can be viewed in terms of the theory detailed in the literature review which addressed the importance of networks and networking in business relationships (Ford et al., 2002; IMP Group 2002) and the recognition that interfirm relationships occur in environments of trust and effective communication. These are the means by which they are sustained. The process of sustainability is a complex arrangement (Maturana and Varela 1980) in that it demonstrates properties of complex adaptive

systems (scalability, interactivity and non linearity). The sustainability that is demonstrated reflects elements of marketing relationship theory, i.e. the way that relationships are maintained and grown are properties of the relational functioning itself and also reflects elements of management's discipline's consideration of sustainability – that it is the leadership of those in the relationship and the direction in which they deliberately move towards that determines sustainability's character. (Sunderlin 1999; Toman 1992; Vickers 2007)

The quantitative analysis shows informants developed longer term relationships, with the average relationship being 8.1 years. This is in line with the literature that shows that buyer and seller (Roegelberg 2007) in interfirm relationships prefer to have “continuing shares of their relationship parties” business (Hutt & Speh 2002) and will work towards sustaining the arrangements that deliver this. Thus the intentions of informants to develop and increase the amount of business they have with the other party is seen as being vital to the relationship. However, the qualitative research augments our understanding of the process of sustainability by highlighting the fact that people may not always be satisfied with a particular relationship (Walker 1990) and may switch.

Both strands of the empirical research reveal that considerable emphasis is placed on trust by both informants. In the qualitative research people mentioned trust unprompted throughout the interviews and in a range of contexts. In the quantitative research trust is highly correlated with most aspects of the relationships considered.

Communication was identified in both sets of empirical findings as contributing to better relations. Informants in the in-depth interviews talked about the importance of being proactive and managing this process as it was critical to the relationship outcomes. This was evidenced by one informant who thought the best communication took place if it was the preferred way of both people, not just one. He found this happened when dealing with a client who was very shy and expressed the view that meeting face-to-face was a waste of time as he disliked face-to-face meetings. This problem was resolved by having 15 minute meetings every couple of months and mainly dealing with the client by phone and written reports which he preferred.

Informants also recognized the importance of optimizing communication frequency. Some highlighted specifically that weekly contact was the minimum amount of communication that should take place. The survey-based research shows that most respondents did communicate with their counterpart in the other organization at least once a week.

Communication's importance was further evidenced by its correlating highly with the intention to continue business and relational factors including quality and commitment to the relationship in the quantitative studies.

Trust was also found to correlate highly with communication and relational sustainability in the quantitative studies. This was further reinforced by informant findings in the qualitative study with informants using the expression "trust", as well as associated terms such as "commitment", "loyalty" and "reciprocation" to describe their (Rogelberg 2007) interactions with the other person. The quantitative study enabled fine tuning of exploration as to the nature of these interactions via the classification of trust into both attitudinal and emotional trust measures. These were shown to have modest discriminatory validity (as per the pattern of correlations reported in the previous chapter).

The information provided by the informants in the in-depth interviews confirmed and extended the findings of the quantitative analysis with respect to the interrelations of aspects of sustaining interfirm relationships. Correlations indicated substantial interrelations. The interview informants provided more in-depth insights into the way that relationship sustainability and development were linked to trust and facilitated by communications within a complex system.

Informants invested time and effort into these relationships because they believe that both parties gain from such arrangements. Further, informants recognized the change which occurs in these interactions, but sometimes felt that as suppliers they were not in a position of power in the relationship.

This was evidenced by informants who felt that their efforts were often not reciprocated or appreciated by the other party. However, there were other informants who believed

the quality and value of their relationships improved when communication and trust developed between the different organizations.

Combining the qualitative and quantitative findings gave only very limited insight into the actual processes that were at work. There was limited data available from the emotions database as the instrument used did not directly question informants about complex processes, self-replication and adaptation.

Furthermore, it was beyond the scope of this research to undertake the comprehensive analysis that would be needed to derive insights from indirect measures from the database. Little further insight emerged from the qualitative research as informants lacked insight or had not previously reflected upon these issues. Only one informant brought up the subject when trying to analyze and describe his interfirm relationships.

The focus of the research has been on considering ways in which relationships are sustained. Some consideration was given to what constituted sustainability – this “self-replication” and/or autopoiesis (to use the vocabulary of complexity theory) involves adaptation to changing circumstances and consequent relationship evolution. The role of trust and communication in this process has been confirmed. Each impacts directly on the sustaining processes and indirectly via their effects on the character and quality of the relationships which in turn impacts on sustaining processes.

6.2 Contributions of the Research

The objectives of this research as articulated in chapter 1 have been achieved. Contemporary academic thought concerning sustainable business-to-business relationships, including the nature and value of sustaining business relationships has been reviewed and analyzed. From this, several important insights have emerged. The literature of marketing and management both make important contributions.

Marketing literature contributes insights on the nature and importance of relationship development (Young 2003). This can be effectively combined with the literature of management which highlights the need to consider the continuing and long-term processes of sustainability. The use of a complexity theory framework assists in the

integration of these literatures and the conceptualization of relationship sustainability as a creative tension between continuity and evolution, stability and change.

The nature and drivers of sustainability have been empirically examined in two ways. The survey analysis confirms the insights from the literature showing the importance of trust and communication in relationship quality and continuity (Young and Wilkinson, 2006). The statistical analysis has validated existing measures of trust, communication, sustainability and relationships. This further supports the use of such measures.

Additionally, and rather unexpectedly, insights emerge from the in-depth interviews as to the lack of reciprocity that characterizes client-service provider relationships and the problems this creates in relationship continuation and sustainability. This differs from the findings of the literature review and quantitative analysis which support fairness, sharing of information and the importance of communication (IMP Group 2002) in interfirm relationships. Trust which has been measured in this context (Young & Alba, 2003) finds that cooperative efforts by both parties lead to the desire for continuity and balance within the relationship. The findings of the in-depth interviews (de Wet 2008) thus imply that power as an aspect may need to be considered in terms of how it enhances or detracts from the relationship and whether it attributes to the lack of reciprocal effort and trust in these situations. However this falls outside of the scope of this research study (Connor & Norman 2005)

The research does contribute insight into the process and the drivers of interfirm relationships and provides further information on more contemporary interfirm relationships. The in-depth interviews conducted add credence to the use of the emotions database which is a valid and informative base.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

The research is limited as it was not possible to develop either a qualitative or quantitative measure (Connor & Norman 2005) of complexity at this stage into interfirm relationships due to limited data and analytical resources. However, the data base provided general insights into the workings of a large number of relationships. The

collection of such data would have been beyond the resources available for this research.

The findings of the literature and empirical analysis could be further enhanced through the creation and or availability of data and measures which consider dynamic situational and environmental factors as these would assist in understanding the complex nature of interfirm relationships. However, these were not available in the database.

Further research into the self-replicating aspects of interfirm relationships could be investigated as the process of understanding interfirm relationships evolves. While considerable research on networks of relationships has been undertaken, the understanding of complex adaptive systems and networks lends itself to this area as each diffuses into the other.

The limitations of the qualitative analysis emerge from the limited number of in-depth interviews and because they were mostly undertaken at a single point in time. Where multiple contacts occurred informants were not systematically questioned, limiting comparability and thus the insights into relationship sustaining processes that occurred. In retrospect, it is obvious that the insights from the in-depth interviews were considerable and somewhat larger-scale. Therefore, a more rigorously designed longitudinal study would be invaluable in future work.

The method of note-taking during interviews also limited the insights to be gained. Only things thought to be important at the time of the interview were noted. No doubt subsequent analysis may have indicated important information that was not noted. Future research should incorporate recording and transcription.

This in turn would enable alternative methods of analysis for the in-depth interviews including consideration of more subtle semantic properties, emotional engagement, etc. There is a rapidly growing capability in automated and non-automated qualitative analysis and these capabilities can, and should be, incorporated into subsequent research in this area.

Finally, the research has confirmed the findings of the literature review in light of the empirical analysis and research objective. The methodological approach was effective with quantitative analysis being integrated successfully with qualitative analysis to provide richer information about the topic of sustaining interfirm relationships.

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Appendices

Appendix 4.1 – Copy of Quantitative Questionnaire

office use:
record no 1 (1)
ID (2-4)
reltype (5)
qcode 1 (6)
study number 3 (7)

FEELINGS IN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEMBERS OF DIFFERENT FIRMS

This study is part of the Interfirm Relations Research Programme (IRRP) which seeks to explore the effectiveness of relationships between firms which trade with one another. At present we are studying the importance of the personal relationships that business people form with their counterparts in other firms and their impact on the way in which firms do business. In this questionnaire we would like to focus on a particular relationship you have with a person in another firm. We do NOT need to know the name of this person or the name of their firm and the answers to all questions will be treated as confidential.

To select a relationship to focus upon, please start by thinking of the relationships you have with other firms where you interact regularly with a particular person or persons in that firm. Consider only relationships where there is some ongoing contact.

Think of a relationship with a particular person which you feel to be an example of a good and/or enjoyable relationship and think of a particular relationship which you feel to be an example of a poor and/or not enjoyable relationship. Write the initials of the other person in each of these relationships in the spaces below. Use initials, a nickname or code which only you can identify.

Type of relation

Initials of other person

Good/Enjoyable

Poor/Not Enjoyable _____

Now to choose between these relationships write your birthdate in below:

_____/_____/_____
day month year

If the year in which you were born is an ODD number please discuss the GOOD relationship you have indicated above in the remainder of the questions in this questionnaire. If the year in which you were born is an EVEN number please discuss the POOR relationship you have indicated above in the remainder of the questions in this questionnaire.

If you are unable to think of a relationship that falls into one of these groups choose the other group (i.e. if you have no good relationships then discuss a poor one, irrespective of the year of your birth). If you have neither any good nor poor relationships, choose a relationship to discuss which is of a type you do have.

To ensure there is no confusion WRITE IN THE SPACE BELOW whether you will be discussing a good or poor relationship or are discussing a relationship of another type (and if so what type of relationship it is).

From now on the other person in this relationship will be referred to as "PERSON X" and the firm they work for will be referred to as "FIRM X".

Should you have any difficulty in answering any questions in the following questionnaire or feel that they do not apply to you, just indicate this and leave the question blank.

Please start by providing us with a general description of this relationship and the people in it.

- Q1)** **A)** How long have you known PERSON X? (write in) _____ years
 (8-9)
- B)** Approximately how old is PERSON X? (write in) _____ years
 (10-11)
- C)** How old are you? (write in) _____ years
 (12-13)
- D.)** What is PERSON X's sex? (circle one) Male---1 Female----2
 (14)
- E.)** What is your sex? (circle one) Male---1 Female----2
 (15)
- Q2)** Generally speaking, how frequently is there some form of contact or communication between you and PERSON X? Is it(circle the one that applies)

- | | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|------|
| | Daily? | 1 | |
| | At least once a week? | 2 | |
| | At least once a month? | 3 | |
| | At least once every three months? | 4 | |
| | At least once every six months? | 5 | |
| | Less than once every six months? | 6 | (23) |

Q3) A) How long has your firm been doing business with Firm X?
(write in) _____ years _____ months (24-25)

B) How long have you personally been involved in your firm's dealings with Firm X? *(write in)*
 _____ years _____ months (26-27)

***Q4) A)** How many different people in Firm X do you personally deal with on a regular or semi-regular basis?
(write in) _____ people (28-29)

B) Are there any other individuals in your firm who deal directly with Firm X? (circle one)
 Yes ---- 1 No ---- 2 **(if no, go to question 5)** (30)

C) How many other individuals in your firm (i.e. excluding yourself) are directly involved in dealings with Firm X? *(write in)*
 _____ people (31-32)

D) Are there any other individuals in your firm who deal directly with PERSON X? (circle one)
 Yes ---- 1 No ---- 2 **(if no, go to question 5)** (33)

E) How many other individuals in your firm (i.e. excluding yourself) are directly involved in dealings with PERSON X? *(write in)*
 _____ people (34-35)

Q5) A) Please describe the kinds of products or services Firm X supplies, produces, distributes, etc.? *(write in)*

 _____ XCODE _____ (36-37)

B) Which of these products or services do Firm X supply to your firm? *(write in)*
 (*If no products or services are supplied by Firm X go to .Q6)
 _____ XCODE _____ (38-39)

C) Considering the product(s) or service(s) you have just described, is Firm X primarily *(circle one)*
 a manufacturer/producer? 1
 a wholesaler or distributor? 2
 a service supplier? 3
 a retailer? 4
 another type of firm, please describe _____ (40)

Q6) A) What kinds of products or services does your firm manufacture, supply, distribute, etc.? *(write in)*
 _____ RCODE _____ (41-42)

Q3) A) How long has your firm been doing business with Firm X?
(write in) _____years _____months **(24-25)**

B) How long have you personally been involved in your firm's dealings with Firm X? (write in)

_____ years _____ months **(26-27)**

*Q4) A) How many different people in Firm X do you personally deal with on a regular or semi-regular basis?
(write in) _____people (28-29)

B) Are there any other individuals in your firm who deal directly with Firm X? (circle one)

Yes ---- 1 No ---- 2 **(if no, go to question 5)** **(30)**

C) How many other individuals in your firm (i.e. excluding yourself) are directly involved in dealings with Firm X? (write in) _____ people (31-32)

D) Are there any other individuals in your firm who deal directly with PERSON X? (circle one)

Yes ---- 1 No ---- 2 **(if no, go to question 5)** **(33)**

E) How many other individuals in your firm (i.e. excluding yourself) are directly involved in dealings with PERSON X? (write in) _____ people (34-35)

Q5) A) Please describe the kinds of products or services Firm X supplies, produces, distributes, etc.? (*write in*)

XCODE (36-37)

B) Which of these products or services do Firm X supply to your firm? (write in)
 (*If no products or services are supplied by Firm X go to .Q6)

_____ *XCODEO* _____ **(38-39)**

C) Considering the product(s) or service(s) you have just described, is Firm X primarily (*circle one*)

a manufacturer/producer?	1	
a wholesaler or distributor?	2	
a service supplier?	3	
a retailer?	4	
another type of firm, please describe		(40)

Q6) A) What kinds of products or services does your firm manufacture, supply, distribute, etc.? (*write in*)

_____ *R*CODE _____ **(41-42)**

B) Please describe the kinds of products or services your firm sells to Firm X ? *(write in)*
(If no products or services are sold to Firm X, go to Q7)

(for office use):

$$P \text{ or } S \quad \underline{\hspace{1.5cm}} \quad (43)$$
$$\overline{Con \text{ or } Ind} \quad (44)$$
$$Res\ B\ or\ S \quad (45)$$

C) For the products and services your firm sells to Firm X, is your firm primarily (*read out and circle only one*

a manufacturer/producer? 1

a wholesaler or retailer? 2

a service supplier? 3

a retailer? 4

another type of firm? (*describe*) _____ (46)

Q7) A) What is the general trend in the amount of business between your firm and Firm X over the past year. (*circle one number*)

<i>Increasing rapidly trend</i>	<i>Increasing Fluctuating, moderately</i>	<i>Increasing slowly</i>	<i>Fairly constant</i>	<i>Decreasing slowly</i>	<i>Decreasing moderately</i>	<i>Decreasing rapidly</i>	<i>no</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	(47)

B) How would you rate the relationship between PERSON X and yourself? *(circle one number)*

<i>Improving rapidly</i>	<i>Improving moderately</i>	<i>Improving slowly</i>	<i>Fairly consistent</i>	<i>Deteriorating slowly</i>	<i>Deteriorating moderately</i>	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

(48)

C) How would you rate your relationship with PERSON X compared to other business relationships you have? Circle the number which best indicates your opinion. If it is one of the best you know circle 1 or 2 depending on how good you think it is, if one of the worst circle 6 or 7 depending on how bad you think it is. If it is somewhere in between circle 3, 4 or 5, whichever best reflects your opinion. (circle one number)

*One of
the best*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 **(49)**

*About
average*

*One of
the worst*

Q 8) A) Below are listed a number of feelings that one might have while interacting with another person. Please indicate the extent to which you have experienced each of these feelings about PERSON X. Circle a low number such as 1 or 2 if you never or almost never feel this way about PERSON X. Circle a high number such as 5 or 6 if you frequently feel in this way, depending on how frequently. Circle 3 or 4 if you occasionally feel this way.

Also indicate the extent to which you think PERSON X has experienced each feeling towards you. Circle the number which best applies or circle "0" if you have no idea whether PERSON X has experienced this feeling towards you or towards your relationship.

	I have this feeling towards PERSON X		I <u>think</u> PERSON X has this feeling		
towards me:	Never	Frequently	Never	Frequently	Don't
Know					
Desire	1---2---3---4---5---6	(52)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(53)
Longing	1---2---3---4---5---6	(54)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(55)
Liking	1---2---3---4---5---6	(56)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(57)
Love	1---2---3---4---5---6	(58)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(59)
Affection	1---2---3---4---5---6	(60)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(61)
Devotion	1---2---3---4---5---6	(62)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(63)
Tenderness	1---2---3---4---5---6	(64)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(65)
Admiration	1---2---3---4---5---6	(66)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(67)
Esteem	1---2---3---4---5---6	(68)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(69)
Respect	1---2---3---4---5---6	(70)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(71)
Reverence	1---2---3---4---5---6	(5)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(6)
Wonder	1---2---3---4---5---6	(7)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(8)
Awe	1---2---3---4---5---6	(9)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(10)
Fascination	1---2---3---4---5---6	(11)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(12)
Acceptance	1---2---3---4---5---6	(13)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(14)
Appreciation	1---2---3---4---5---6	(15)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(16)
Gratitude	1---2---3---4---5---6	(17)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(18)
Trust	1---2---3---4---5---6	(19)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(20)
Faith	1---2---3---4---5---6	(21)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(22)
Sympathetic	1---2---3---4---5---6	(23)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(24)
Compassion	1---2---3---4---5---6	(25)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(26)
Anger	1---2---3---4---5---6	(27)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(28)
Irritation	1---2---3---4---5---6	(29)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(30)
Rage	1---2---3---4---5---6	(31)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(32)
Fear	1---2---3---4---5---6	(33)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(34)
Terror	1---2---3---4---5---6	(35)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(36)
Contempt	1---2---3---4---5---6	(37)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(38)
Disgust	1---2---3---4---5---6	(39)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(40)
Horror	1---2---3---4---5---6	(41)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(42)
Appalled	1---2---3---4---5---6	(43)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(44)
Rejection	1---2---3---4---5---6	(45)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(46)
Dislike	1---2---3---4---5---6	(47)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(48)
Hate	1---2---3---4---5---6	(49)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(50)
Resentment	1---2---3---4---5---6	(51)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(52)
Dread	1---2---3---4---5---6	(53)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(54)
Indifference	1---2---3---4---5---6	(55)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(56)
Uncaring	1---2---3---4---5---6	(58)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(59)
Suspicion	1---2---3---4---5---6	(60)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(61)
Jealousy	1---2---3---4---5---6	(62)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(63)
Envy	1---2---3---4---5---6	(64)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(65)

B) Below are listed other feelings that one might have while interacting with another person. Please indicate the extent to which you have experienced each of these feelings in your relationship with PERSON X. Again, circle a low number such as 1 or 2 if you never or almost never feel this way as a result of participating in the relationship. Circle a high number such as 5 or 6 if you frequently feel in this way, depending on how frequently. Circle 3 or 4 if you occasionally feel this way as a result of participating in the relationship.

Also indicate the extent to which you think PERSON X has experienced each feeling. Circle the number which best applies or circle "0" if you have no idea whether the other party has experienced this feeling as a result of participating in the relationship with you.

	I have this feeling in this relationship:		I <u>think</u> PERSON X has this feeling in the relationship with me:		
	Never Don't Know	Frequently	Never	Frequently	
Confidence (69)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(68)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
Courage (71)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(70)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
Security (73)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(72)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
Pride (75)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(74)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
Satisfaction (77)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(76)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
(Self) worth (6)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(5)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
Goodness (8)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(7)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
Joy (10)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(9)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
Gladness (12)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(11)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
Elation (14)	1---2---3---4---5---6	(13)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	
Serenity	1---2---3---4---5---6	(15)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(16)
Relief	1---2---3---4---5---6	(17)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(18)
Hope	1---2---3---4---5---6	(19)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(20)
Eagerness	1---2---3---4---5---6	(21)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(22)
Excitement	1---2---3---4---5---6	(23)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(24)
Enthusiasm	1---2---3---4---5---6	(25)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(26)
Contentment	1---2---3---4---5---6	(27)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(28)
Cheer	1---2---3---4---5---6	(29)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(30)
Happiness	1---2---3---4---5---6	(31)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(32)
Depression	1---2---3---4---5---6	(33)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(34)
Helplessness	1---2---3---4---5---6	(35)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(36)
Discouragement	1---2---3---4---5---6	(37)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(38)
Sadness	1---2---3---4---5---6	(39)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(40)
Anxiety	1---2---3---4---5---6	(41)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(42)
Upset	1---2---3---4---5---6	(43)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(44)
Shame	1---2---3---4---5---6	(45)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(46)
Embarrassment	1---2---3---4---5---6	(47)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(48)
Guilt	1---2---3---4---5---6	(49)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(50)
Worthlessness	1---2---3---4---5---6	(51)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(52)

Sorrow	1---2---3---4---5---6	(53)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(54)
Hurt	1---2---3---4---5---6	(55)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(56)
Loneliness	1---2---3---4---5---6	(57)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(58)
Despair	1---2---3---4---5---6	(59)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(60)
Panic	1---2---3---4---5---6	(61)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(62)
Apathy	1---2---3---4---5---6	(63)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(64)
Boredom	1---2---3---4---5---6	(65)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(66)
Frustration	1---2---3---4---5---6	(67)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(68)
Disappointment	1---2---3---4---5---6	(69)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(70)
Disinterest	1---2---3---4---5---6	(71)	1---2---3---4---5---6	0	(72)

Q9) A) In general, how enjoyable do you personally find meeting with PERSON X?
(Circle number of one answer only)

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Very Enjoyable | 1 | |
| Fairly Enjoyable | 2 | |
| Neither Enjoyable or Unenjoyable | 3 | |
| Fairly Unenjoyable | 4 | |
| Very Unenjoyable | 5 | (73) |

B) Indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling the appropriate number. If you strongly agree with a statement circle a high number like 5 or 6, if you strongly disagree circle a number such as 1 or 2. If you neither agree or disagree circle a number in the middle such as 3 or 4.

	Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree
a) In general, I find PERSON X to be:							
Likeable/Friendly	6	5	4	3	2	1	(74)
Honest/Candid	6	5	4	3	2	1	(75)
Competent	6	5	4	3	2	1	(76)
Dependable/Reliable	6	5	4	3	2	1	(77)
Oriented to my firm's needs	6	5	4	3	2	1	(78)
b) If I have problems in dealing with Firm X, I can call upon PERSON X to help sort things out	6	5	4	3	2	1	(5)
c) I might chat with PERSON X simply because I like them and we get on well, rather than solely because of business	6	5	4	3	2	1	(6)
d) Generally, the best way to get things done is to build good personal relations with the individuals I work with in the firms I do business with	6	5	4	3	2	1	(7)
e) PERSON X has on occasion called upon me for advice or to help out in an area not directly related to our business dealings	6	5	4	3	2	1	(8)
f) There are no real friends in business	6	5	4	3	2	1	(9)
g) Generally, an effective way to build good relations with people I do business with is to meet away from the office for lunch, drinks, etc	6	5	4	3	2	1	(10)
h) I meet quite often with PERSON X away from the office for lunch, drinks, etc	6	5	4	3	2	1	(11)
i) I consider my relationship with PERSON X to be as much a friendship as a business relation.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(12)

- Q10) A)** Listed below are a number of aspects of your relationship with PERSON X that might have changed over the time that you have been dealing with each other. For each one indicate the extent to which your relationship with PERSON X has improved, got worse or has not changed. If it has improved circle 5, 6 or 7, depending on how much it has improved. If it has got worse circle a 1, 2 or 3 depending on how much worse. If it has not changed or has changed only slightly circle a 3, 4, or 5 whichever best reflects your opinion.

	Much Improved			Unchanged			Much Worse	
Quality of communication	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(13)
*Quality of relations between individuals in each firm	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(14)
Mutual trust/respect	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(15)
Mutual commitment to the relationship	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(16)
Your performance	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(17)
Your trust in PERSON X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(18)
Your commitment to PERSON X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(19)
PERSON X's performance	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(20)
PERSON X's trust in you	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(21)
PERSON X's commitment to you	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(22)

- B)** In the same manner as above indicate the extent to which you feel each of the following characteristics have increased, not changed or decreased over the time you have been dealing with PERSON X.

	Much Increased			Unchanged			Much Decreased	
Frequency of communication with PERSON X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(23)
Closeness of you and PERSON X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(24)
Extent of common goals with PERSON X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(25)
Your dependence on PERSON X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(26)
PERSON X's dependence on you	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(27)
Dollar value of business with Firm X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(28)
Volume of business with Firm X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(29)
Range of products and/or services bought or sold	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(30)
The size of your firm	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(31)
The size of Firm X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(32)
Your personal involvement with PERSON X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(33)

- *C)** Indicate, to the best of your knowledge, the extent to which each of the following characteristics of your firm's relationships with Firm X has changed over time:

	Changed Very Much			Changed Moderately			Unchanged	
The way in which your firm and Firm X do business with one another	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(34)
Personnel in your firm who do business with Firm X	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(35)
Personnel in Firm X who do business with your firm	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(36)

The next section of the questionnaire looks at how business gets done between your firm and Firm X.

***Q11)** For each of the pairs of statements given below indicate which best describes the nature of the business dealings between your firm and Firm X. If you think the statement on the left is more accurate circle a low number, 1 or 2, depending on how accurate. If the statement on the right is more accurate circle a high number, 5 or 6, depending on how accurate. If the nature of the business with Firm X is somewhere in between, circle 3 or 4, whichever best reflects your opinion.

	a) Sales occur frequently	1	2	3	4	5	6	Sales occur infrequently	(37)
	b) The size of <u>each</u> sale is large	1	2	3	4	5	6	The size of <u>each</u> sale is small	(38)
	c) The ordering procedure is very standardised	1	2	3	4	5	6	Each order is individually negotiated	(39)
service(s)	d) The product(s) or service(s) required are virtually the same in each sale	1	2	3	4	5	6	The product(s) or required are very different in each sale	(40)
or	e) The quantity of product(s) or service(s) required is virtually the same in each sale	1	2	3	4	5	6	The quantity of product(s) service(s) required varies a lot in each sale	(41)
(42)	f) The (unit) prices do not vary in each sale	1	2	3	4	5	6	The (unit) prices vary a lot in each sale	
traded	g) The product(s)/service(s) traded are very important to the buying firm's operations	1	2	3	4	5	6	The product(s)/service(s) are of little importance to the buying firm's	(43)
traded	h) The product(s)/service(s) traded are very easy to get from another firm	1	2	3	4	5	6	The product(s)/service(s) very difficult or impossible to get from another firm	(44)
simple	i) The product(s)/service(s) traded are technically complex	1	2	3	4	5	6	The product(s)/service(s) traded are technically	(45)

Q12) Listed below and on the next page are a number of statements that may or may not apply to your relationship with PERSON X. In each case please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement as an accurate description of your relationship with PERSON X by circling the appropriate number. (If you strongly agree circle a high number like 5 or 6 depending on how strongly you agree, if you strongly disagree circle a low number such as 1 or 2 and if you neither agree or disagree circle a number in the middle such as 3 or 4, whichever best reflects your opinion.)

	Strongly Agree						Strongly Disagree
I have the desire and ability to maintain a good trading relationship with PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(46)
I work hard to maintain a good working relationship with PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(47)
My firm's profitability is sometimes obtained at the cost of Firm X's profitability.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(48)
I am only concerned with promoting my firm's own interests.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(49)
I am usually able to look at issues from PERSON X's point of view.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(50)
I trust PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(51)
I work well as a team with PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(52)
I behave in a trustworthy manner towards PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(53)
I have and demonstrate a sincere interest in PERSON X's success.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(54)
My firm's operations would be in serious trouble if I were let down by PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(55)
Sometimes I have to alter the facts slightly to get what I want from PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(56)
I am interested in helping to make Firm X's operations profitable.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(57)
Sometimes it is necessary to hold back information from PERSON X to get things done.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(58)
I search for solutions to any joint problems PERSON X and I may have.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(59)
Sometimes I promise to do things for PERSON X without actually doing them later.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(60)
It would be easy for me to replace my relationship with PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(61)
I frequently disagree with PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(62)
I am satisfied with the relationship I have with PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(63)
Most of the disagreements I have had with PERSON X in the past year were settled to our satisfaction.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(64)
PERSON X has a genuine interest in my firm's continued business.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(65)
Communication between me and PERSON X is very efficient .	6	5	4	3	2	1	(66)
PERSON X has the desire and ability to maintain a good trading relationship with me.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(67)
PERSON X is usually able to look at issues from my point of view.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(68)
PERSON X is interested in helping my firm to make its operations profitable.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(69)

	Strongly Strongly Agree Disagree						
I am kept informed by PERSON X about things I ought to know.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(70)
I feel PERSON X is generally very fair in working with me.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(71)
I have confidence in the accuracy of the information I get from PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1.	(72)
I have confidence in the fairness and honesty of PERSON X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(73)
When an agreement is made with PERSON X, I can generally rely on them to fulfil all the requirements involved.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(74)
PERSON X searches for solutions to any joint problems we may have.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(75)
I can always rely on being informed early enough by PERSON X in areas of importance to my firm.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(76)
PERSON X demonstrates a sincere interest in my firm's success.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(77)
I think PERSON X is satisfied with the relationship with me .	6	5	4	3	2	1	(78)
PERSON X works well as a team with me.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(79)
It would be easy for PERSON X to replace their relationship with me.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(80)
Firm X's profitability is sometimes obtained at the cost of my firm's profitability.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(5)
PERSON X sometimes suggests unnecessary changes in practices and procedures for doing business.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(6)
PERSON X's refusal to make reasonable compromises and concessions adversely affects my relationship with them.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(7)
I am satisfied with the way PERSON X conducts business.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(8)
PERSON X is only concerned with promoting their own interests.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(9)
PERSON X would be in serious trouble if they were let down by me.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(10)
I have a genuine interest in continuing to do business with Firm X.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(11)
PERSON X makes me feel that my contribution is valuable.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(12)
Sometimes I get the impression that PERSON X and I are not getting through to each other.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(13)
PERSON X behaves in a trustworthy manner towards me.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(14)
I think PERSON X trusts me.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(15)
The relationship between PERSON X and me is characterized by:							
- close and continuous personal contacts	6	5	4	3	2	1	(16)
- numerous good personal relationships between the individuals of the two firms.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(17)

- confidence in each other	6	5	4	3	2	1	(18)
-high levels of commitment to the relationship.	6	5	4	3	2	1	(19)

Q13) Listed below are a series of words which might describe a particular relationship. Using the scale shown, please indicate the extent to which each of the attributes is present in your relationship with PERSON X. For example, if your relationship with PERSON X is characterized to a large extent by a the attribute, choose a high number such as 9 or 8 depending on the extent to which the attribute is present. If your relationship is characterized to a very small extent by this attribute circle a low number such as 1 or 0. If it is somewhere in between choose a number from the middle which best reflects your opinion. (Circle the appropriate number for each.)

	High				Moderate				Low		
coordination	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(20)
dissension	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(21)
coalition of interests	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(22)
emotional outbursts	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(23)
respectfulness	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(24)
inconsistency	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(25)
mutual confidence	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(26)
crossness/anger	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(27)
companionship	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(28)
unreasonable demands	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	(29)

Q14) **A)** How likely or unlikely is it that your firm will stop trading with Firm X in the foreseeable future?
Circle a number from the scale below to indicate your answer. (If your relationship has ended already, circle number "6" and go to Q15).

Very likely 6 5 4 3 2 1 *Very unlikely* (30)

B) To what extent does your firm want to continue doing business with Firm X? Circle a number from the scale below to indicate your answer

Very Much Want *Very Much*
want *to stop* 6 5 4 3 2 1 *to*
continue (31)

C) Would you continue to do business with PERSON X even if they moved to another Firm?

Very Likely 6 5 4 3 2 1 *Very Unlikely* (32)

Q15) In closing, is there anything else about your relationship with PERSON X we have not covered in the questionnaire that you think is worth mentioning?

(33-34)

(continue on back of questionnaire if necessary)

Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

***A summary of the results of this research will be made available to any participating firm who wishes it. Do you want a summary? (circle one)**

YES ---- 1

NO ---- 2

(34)

Please write the full mailing address to which you would like this summary report to be sent below.

(Due to the scope of this research, the summary will not be available until next year).

If you have any further comments or queries please contact Ms. Louise Young at the address below

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Appendix 5.1

Copy of Depth Interview Questionnaire (Qualitative Interviews)

Q1. How do you view B2B relationships?

Q2 Are some relationships shorter than others?

Q3 What are your feelings about the shorter relationships?

Q4 And the longer relationships..how do you see these?

Q5 Do you find that some clients use more than one supplier for a similar type of service at the same time? How do you feel about this?

Q6 Why do you think they use more than one supplier?

Q7 Does it make you feel that some clients are not as loyal to the relationship as you are?

Q8 Let's discuss your own personal effort which you put into a business relationship now.

Q9 How many relationships do you deal with at the same time?

Q10 Are some more important than others?

Q11 How do you communicate with them?

Q12How do you develop the relationship with them?

Q13 Is it difficult to gain their trust?

Q14How do you deal with any issues or problems that arise?

Q15 Let's look at how you deal, communicate, and develop the relationship with someone you consider you have a positive relationship with in business.

Q16 Then let's think about one where the relationship is not as positive.

Q17 Do you believe that some small clients can become bigger clients?

Q18 And how about feelings in these relationships in a business sense. Does it help if you like the person you are dealing with?

Q19 If you think about the relationships you have had do you feel that the other party puts in the same amount of effort as you?

Thankyou for your time.

Appendix 5.2 Qualitative Interview Notes

This appendix contains information from seven informants.

Sample Design for initial interviews

Depth interviews were undertaken in 2003 with two people in Marketing Communications. A follow-up interview was conducted with one of the participants in December 2005-January 2006.

Two interviews were conducted with people working in services – financial January 3 2006.

A fifth interview was conducted as a series of discussions during the second half of 2005, with a follow-up interview by telephone January 24 2006. The respondent stressed the need to be anonymous and the identity of the organization in financial services was not to be revealed.

A sixth interview was undertaken with a marketing person

A seventh interview was conducted with a Business Relationship Manager in the Telecommunications industry in January 2006.

The purpose of these interviews has been undertaken to determine the following:

- The types of business relationships these people have experienced
- What sort of relationships these were/are?
- The main emotions which they can identify indirectly or directly associated with such relationships such as trust. In the Journal of Managerial Issues' article called "Toward an understanding of loyalty: the moderating role of trust" the paper examines "the construct of trust." (Holden, Reed, 1997)
- It is seen as "an important element of long-term buyer-seller relationships in a business environment (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Dwyer et al., 1987).
- "Previous research in both psychological and business situations which attempt to measure trust have been problematic. Some of these problems include issues of multi-dimensionality and a lack of reliability (Coraz, 1977).
- To discover if there are any themes or patterns in the language or body movement of the interviewees.
- To discover any themes or underlying patterns of communication or attitude in this area.
- To discover unexpected findings – extreme views which could prompt further research.

Recruitment and Interviewing

The Two Marketing Communications Interviews

I approached two people, A and D who readily agreed to participate in the interviews. I have known both for some time. A and I were classmates a longtime ago and our friendship spans more than 20 years. I conducted informal follow-up interviews with A

The second person D is an industry person who I meet about three years ago. I decided not to seek a follow-up interview with D as during our contact in the past couple of years since the interview he left the industry and returned to full time study.

Location

Both D and A suggested doing the interviews at their homes even though I left the location open and gave them the option of choosing their preferred location – office, UTS were the other options. They were both comfortable to ‘start chatting’ in their living rooms seated in their favourite leather chairs. Black for A, blue for D. Recording the interview didn’t seem to make them feel uncomfortable. Both interviews were audio taped only although David did offer to set up professional equipment to film his.

A’s interview took place one Saturday evening and D’s during the day. A’s interview took about an hour and D’s one and a half hours.

Setting Up the Interviews – Background

I must say I was surprised by the amount of interest both showed in being interviewed. A says the topic is of interest because working in MarCom both she and her boss value relationships and think it’s an important topic. She even suggested going out to lunch with her boss to talk about the topic. I will take her up on her offer one day.

D, the Managing Director of a Multimedia company is interested in learning and also has a background in clinical psychology, something which I was not aware of pre-interview. He has a great interest in education and offered to assist me should I ever need some research material.

I felt both took the interviews quite seriously and were genuinely interested in helping me with my research. Both asked me what sort of questions I would be asking them before the interview, while D asked me to send him a list of questions or topic areas so he could prepare and give some thought to his answers. I also appreciated his offer of setting up equipment but decided not to due to the set up time involved.

In the future however I feel I would like to have my own equipment to record such interviews as I think there is value in capturing the body language, expressions, changes in languages and gestures, as well as the silences and change in pace of the interview.

The interviewees

What are they like?

A is outgoing, vivacious, friendly, warm, expressive. Aged about 40 she describes herself as 'sporty'. She's fairly open and has a lot of empathy for people. During the interview she emphasized how it's important to be 'business friends' with people. A's worked in MarComm for several years and also works with her husband in their training business. I think she's a really good "salesperson" but she says she's not always comfortable mixing with new people.

A's face is expressive. She tends to make a fair bit of eye contact. She's a kind person and fairly forgiving of other people. She will go out of her way to help her friends. In the best Australian sense she comes across as 'down to earth' even though she is of Armenian heritage.

D can best be described as mid-30s going on mid-50. He describes himself as reserved. He comes across as extremely articulate, a deep thinker and a great helper to people. He's experienced tremendous responsibility both in his personal and professional life at a fairly young age. For instance he was approached to head up one of the country's largest Multimedia companies as its MD at the age of 30. And he likes to study. He's qualified as a psychologist, is studying Law and Multimedia and is a bit of a gym goer as well. I personally find him quite amazing in that he has accomplished so much but is very low key about his life. He also describes himself as 'resourceful.'

He tends to use move his hands when making a point and he chooses his words fairly carefully. He is European and middle Eastern but considers himself to be an Australian. He emphasizes the importance of integrity and the need to make people feel special, but you sense there is more detachment, less personal involvement with clients perhaps explained by his training as a psychologist. I found him to be more analytical than A.

Intra-interviews

A

Annette seems to have taken a nurturing approach to her interfirm relationships. For instance she has picked up on the expression of one of her client "he wants to have a good time with the people he's working with" and have 'business friendships.'

She thinks it's important to remember personal things about clients. She says it's the little things that count.

1. "I think the work is probably 30 to 40 percent a and I think the relationship is 60 to 70 percent"
2. Little things count such as 'vouchers'.

David

David seems to be less emotional about his business relationships. For instance he felt it wasn't important to like the client. And while he expressed feeling loyal to his clients he felt many clients didn't reciprocate. There were a few surprises in his interview such as his selection of words to describe being part of a client's 'social fringe' and the need to be adaptable – both subjective and objective. Clearly David seemed interested in making his clients feel a bit special. His method of doing this was to communicate that the goals of the project had been achieved and also in giving them different budgets to suit their different needs.

Inter-interviews - Similarities and Differences between Interviewees

I decided to put the responses of Annette and David to key questions into a table of information in an attempt to distinguish where they expressed similar views or where there were marked differences.

Similarities

Both gave the impression that each was committed to their respective clients, yet they accepted that their clients might not always feel the same way about them. David talks of "feelings which might not be reciprocated" and Annette talks of giving value to short term clients who don't stay around.

Both identified the key emotions which they felt were important in interfirm as relationships. In Annette's case it was a sense of loyalty, of commitment, and some personal involvement. Also giving value. In David's case he gave the reasons of integrity, honesty and commitment to his clients.

Differences

There were some significant differences between David and Annette, particularly in relation to the number of business relationships each had had. Annette said she'd had "about four to five" in the past couple of years. While David said of his 60 business relationships in the past year "about three per cent" were long-term. His measure two years or more.

The reasons David gave for the small percentage of retained relationships seemed to indicate the industry of events management was fairly 'high turnover'. Annette on the other hand seemed resigned to the fact that clients will source their creative ideas from more than one design house.

The two also differed in the amount of personal involvement they invested into the business relationship. Annette talked of 'business friendship', David of 'social fringe' of his client's circles.

In terms of nonverbal communication during the interview, Annette was quite animated when talking about 'personal dealings' such as sending a client their favourite bottle of drink if they had had a hard week, while David was more animated in talking about the 'changing client face' and the fact that people change companies frequently in the business. But he also viewed this in a positive light as he saw it as a way of continuing and extending the network.

Information pre and post interview – before the tape was switched on or off

Great sources and Great bites of information

David

Talked about receiving a chocolate frog from a client which made him feel anything but special.

Annette

Talked about the need for some clients to socialize, and taking them to sporting events etc. Didn't want to do too much socializing with clients but achieve some sort of balance.

Table of findings –

Interviewee	Annette	David	Similarities	Differences
Topic				

1. Number of business relationships	<p>“About four to five”.</p> <p>“One of companies was an alcohol company. a relationship with a previous design company about four years in total.”</p>	<p>About 40 to 60 in the past year.</p> <p>About three per cent</p>		<p>Big difference in number of relationships. Perhaps indicative of industries. Annette is in packaged goods, David is referring to Events Management in this instance</p>
2. Reason for number of relationships	Depends on the dollar value	<p>the fact that you have proven to the client that you have done a good job for the last 4 years, does not relieve you of the expectation to come up with fresh ideas.</p> <p>great ideas are readily embraced only to be watered down due to budget constraints.</p> <p>can put you at a disadvantage, where you know the client well and their budget constrictions and so you tailor the proposal accordingly.</p>	<p>Acceptance by both that it is the nature of the business that people don't source only one company.</p>	<p>Annette talks about the dollar value being the reason for the number of relationships, while David gives them impression that clients are not faithful in this industry of events management but flighty?</p>

		A rival company wins on the basis of submitting ideas that sound great but will inevitably be watered down due to budget cuts.		
<p>2. Faithfulness or loyalty of companies</p> <p>Do you find that clients use a variety of companies or just the one?</p>	a lot of companies start off with one main company at the beginning or onset of the creative process. But invariably they do use other companies.	Our commitment is not always rewarded with a mutual one.	Seems to be an acceptance that companies will use more than one company, Neither of them were very happy about it.	
Reasons why?	The demands can be quite high in a short space of time. They might need a lot of work carried out very quickly and psychologically they think one company can't deal with an overload situation. In many companies they are actually trained or encouraged to deal with other agencies so that they can benefit from a variety of	<p>natural for our competition to approach these same companies to win their business</p> <p>some clients are more upfront about it than others.</p>		Annette talks about demanding clients. David seems to imply that client's behaviour may not always be how he would like it.

	creative sources.			
Personal efforts to retain client relationship	Sending them a bottle of their favourite drink if they've had a hard week with a note saying you hope it will get better.	<p>the key to keeping a relationship going is communication and quality service - even after the project is completed.</p> <p>I tend to give the client different versions of the same ideas from deluxe to budget.</p> <p>more people have to be aware that year after year you may not be dealing with the same representative of that company. the same person may not be in the job for more than two years and then they leave ...and then you have to approach the new rep and they might have their own preferred suppliers.</p> <p>all those</p>	Trying to personalize their offering to the client.	<p>Annette's approach is very nurturing. She is a mother of two.</p> <p>David seems a little more practical but has empathy in trying to accommodate the different needs of the clients.</p>

		inroads in that company are lost and you have to start from scratch again.		
Feelings on short relationships	<p>this is an unusual case and it's mainly in the minority. The typical scenario is where you continue to do work with them on an ongoing basis because you have built the relationship and you have a level of trust. Sometimes I find in the short relationships that possibly the person is not interested in what the way we work or there is usually some other thing going on in the company where they are not being allowed to develop a relationship. Or you haven't</p>	He said earlier that many of the relationships were short term.	I think both would obviously like to have clients who are longer term	David has a much higher proportion of short term business relationships.

	clicked with the person, that's the other thing.			
Can think about how you feel when dealing with your best client?	"Business friendships". Having a good time.	important client knows that you have tried to surpass their expectations – whether it is saving them money or going that extra		
On trying relationships with clients		difficult to be patient with them especially when they start to panic		
		you're there to make them look good it is a constant challenge to reassure them that everything's ok even though they question what you do.		
Is it important to like your client?		sometimes you develop a dislike to a client tries to include you into their social fringe you prefer not have anything to do with them on a social level because you just don't		

		click. a bit tricky. The key is to try and maintain some sort of balance, and being mindful of not crossing any boundaries.		
		times that I have clicked with clients and have been included in their social arena.		
		I think you have to realize they're the one paying the billsI think as long as you can get along with them on a professional level that's enough. You don't have to necessarily like them but you should always respect them. When you feel that clients are trying to cross boundaries or expecting more than was negotiated, I always try and be firm yet polite and negotiate rather than develop a grudge or become avoidant.		

Second batch of interviews Interview conducted 3 January 2006 in interviewee's home in Sydney.

Third informant

Interview notes. The nature of the interview was quite informal. The interviewee has worked in financial services for the past eight years, most of it spent in superannuation administration dealing with corporate clients and advisers predominantly through telephone relationships and email. Face to face meetings with clients are the exception rather than the norm.

Personality type: Introvert. Seems to seek reassurance throughout the interview. Speaks fairly cautiously. Quietly spoken.

Mid 30s. Level of education: TAFE certificate/diploma.

Asked for some explanation of area of study and felt that he was equipped to answer question.

Q1. How do you view B2B relationships?

"Well it depends on the company, the adviser. Some advisers have more power than the company. It seems to be the bigger ones have more power than the smaller ones. The smaller you are the less you have power. They let you know."

Q. They let you know. How do they let you know?

They use communication, the words they use, the terminology. I guess it's on importance they let you know they're important, whether they know it's the tone of voice, the language, also sometimes they say we've got one of the biggest clients. So you meant to know.

Q Do you actually meet these people face to face then?

Some brokers you meet face to face, and accountants, not always other company's people in HR, payroll, they have your direct number.

So knowing their power you have it at the back of your mind to treat them as a client still, even if you know they're not as powerful, it's something to fall back on, you're not going to rub them up the wrong way, you don't want them to complain.

Q So how would you describe the sort of relationship you have with these people? You could answer this by thinking about a relationship you think is good.

It depends on the workload they get what they want. Then if they get what they want, they're happy, you're happy. But it's the BDM role if they're happy with the service they'll push the product, bring in more clients, and negotiate fees and conditions and charges.

So to describe it it's having a good rapport, probably working relationship you can even talk about other things besides work. It makes it easier. You have mutual respect, you like each other.

Q Then think of a relationship you would consider being poor.

I guess with all of them you have to be assertive; they might try and take advantage. I guess if it's not such a good relationship you haven't got anything to lose to try and turn it around. It's better if everyone is cordial doesn't always happen. With the medium to larger clients if you don't have such a good relationship with them but they haven't got much you're not going to go too far out of your way.

Q But could these small clients become more important?

A one million (dollar) doesn't turn into a 10 or 20 (million). A one million dollar client is always going to be small.

So I guess you wouldn't respect them as much, you need to be more assertive, they can be irritating, like a nuisance, but you don't take it personally They can be irate, but they're not aiming at you, it's because you are taking over from where other people left off.

They could be frustrated by the structure. You can't alienate people. Then as there is more money coming in the better The one million dollars stills adds up when they try and dodgy things. In a nice way you say not, but there's no alternative. Also sometimes the turnaround if someone rang on 30 June for Reconciliation spreadsheet for the company and wants them on July 1, they want a break down, expect a breakdown, members exiting, then the end of the financial before the cut off they have to wait. And they accept it.

Some advisers will say yes to everything if not getting them to say yes. Like its business, being professional, not to be good friends, you don't have to be great friends, they're still a client.

You maintain your professional distance, nothing too personal. You need to draw the line You don't want it to be too personal. It's alright if they ask what you did on the weekend after you've been dealing with each other for a few years.

One adviser asked a friend too many personal questions about their relationship which was dirty.

Q So do you trust people in B2b Relationships?

You trust them as much as you think they can be trusted. If they keep their word. Some people wine and dine clients, and have sold so much there are business incentives if they reach target, all expenses paid, first class trips to Europe with their partner.

It's every year.

Q So how do you communicate?

It's easier with phone and email and in also in person. It depends on where they located geographically. If it's in the same city, but then a lot of contacts were in different states so it was on the phone.

You have to be guarded, alert, you're still representing the company and the company's interest are the first priority

Ends

Two days after the interview BA commented to me that he thought he was a bit brief.

Fourth informant

Interviewee 2 – professional specializing in audit of organizations and investigations. Interviewed in another person's home.

I deal with professional bodies, different departments, and companies, agencies, getting internal advice from another party or technical advice internally or through external organizations.

Q How would you describe the nature of you interfirm relationships?

There is always continual negotiation, delaying with superiors, collectors, internal or externally whether they tax agents, in public office, Vice Presidents, ceos had dealings with insurance companies, clubs, there is involvement with people every step of the way, in bankruptcies, there could be dealing with police, higher authorities, and third parties giving information. We may seek family information, registrations, electoral information, infringement information, transaction frequency or dealing with the stock exchange.

It could be personal or companies.

But we must always be careful of information, confidentiality and third parties. We must work within the confines of the law and privacy and can't reveal information to competitors which is in contravention of duties and be largely judgmental on how far I go.

Communication sometimes has to be established, if I reveal too much I could be held in contempt, there has to be sensitivity, it's dangerous if the wrong person gets involved, we have to be careful of allegations of corruption You always have to be careful, in dealing with people that you're not playing ball.

Small business takes it more personally, much of it is an extension of them.

With Public Companies dealing with billions the employees are not affected.

If it works well it reduces stress, partners expectation's if dialogue is good and the people are inexperienced then we go to higher ranking people. People need to be informed correctly, we want information to be accurate.

Q Can you use the same communication approach with all people.

With government agencies and people off the street it's different, with officialdom they're guarded.

More times than not there is active compliance which we monitor, we have to make sure we're on the radar.

With information and bigger companies there is a degree of respect, of professionalism.

If you need information then it can be reciprocated.

Sometimes you have to change and go higher and then people with academic excellence will test you out. So people complain for the sake of complaining. But sometimes there is a vested interest which could be worth a billion

Q Is there trust?

You do and you don't. You're responsible, not to go away, you have to manage it.

There's a critical path, telephone, email, the fax has to be regulated. Often there are difficulties there are other matters. It's a balancing act, they've got to work for clients.

If you can establish a respectful relationship. Respectful exchange information within reason, continual relationship. It's just not in your best interest to be aloof or hostile, not in your best interest to delay or in the worst case to go to court or be fined, or even lose your job.

At the top level they may know how to deal with a law enforcement agency.

There can be flaring up, lost tempers, people get impatient, if they're hiding or camouflaging something, not disclosing, they could be talking about a concept, a business system and need to allow multinational influence, requirements, influence gets very detailed. If it was that easy.

Q. Do you have the upper hand.

If you do have the upper hand you don't rub their face in it, give mutual regard, formally and legally it's bad for both and you don't need to have such a formal relationship. You have to have mutual regard, formally a legal relationships could be bad for both. You don't need regulation.

There is publicity, it is better for clients to be interactive. There are stakeholders, and if it's still going two or three later then it's better for the clients to be interactive. So if we help them we expect some assistance too on a informal basis.

There are resource to match, the pressure is on everyone. There can be withholding of information, verbal.

Some are disappointed, it can be controversial one year down the track, you try and be professional, you don't want a screaming and yelling match.

But it's hard to know how effective you have been. There are feedback questionnaires, dialogue, there are expectations, there is information forthcoming, changing of plans, explaining you need extra time, you agree on deadlines, intentions, but plans are changing. People get sick, the system, the information is abroad, resources are limited, people get sacked. The direction is not black and white, differently, it's active and complicated.

There are risk reviews with tax payers, there is a degree of risk, working parties, different parties applied.

There is high risk you have to move with extreme caution otherwise there will be legal cases, there is a move to monitoring, to see them more often.

With the new compliance and public rulings and policy stakeholders can seek belief and you have to make sure they're not abusing the system. There is high consideration for abuse.

It can be bad news when there's two different egos and there's a million dollars to pay, they can feel wounded. You try to prevent this and to be positive. It's not black and white. There is economics and management influences. The company could be worth \$1000 million and you have to understand the business and the competitor products and their product range as well as advertising and marketing. There is the management function, assets and the risk.

You need to be at arm's length, know about their expenditure and assets you might seek stats from the ABS on profitability, leasing and capitalization. You need to know about contracts and it depends on the industry you're dealing with. Some take it personally. If they're the company secretary they feel as if you have found out their weaknesses and they have to explain to stakeholders.

To a company, to an officer there can be hostility, aloofness with you as you might be able to sense something that's not kosher and if there are holes then they feel like they haven't done their job.

And they have to deliver the bad news. You see their emails, diaries, get personal information, if they receive a bonus for a bad year when the companies not making money then you ask them for what?

For example if the business is running at a loss, then they can get a bit abrasive.

I've been insulted by lawyers where I've put deadlines on them where it is applicable

They try to meet them and they try to get more control, the time is always blown out, its extended. They play the 'blame game'.

Its stressful at times, they want to look better in the client's eyes, so that they might have a hidden agenda, and try and be the deal maker.

With reviews you have to manage the job be seen to able to administer the case

It's challenging in understanding every concept, there are time constraints as well

If you lose control of time lines then they control the game Just give you a response, they're trying to delay the inevitable.

There is stress you try to minimize, try to control the anxt, the rules on how they are going, one week before you send correspondence, do they need extra time, they could have been on holidays or been ill. You need to be compassionate to a point. They have to play the game.

You need to document every call for example to identify assistance given, contact, so that's it's not the 11th hour looking for information.

I have to look like I care even though you don't care.

There could be delay tactics, that's a frustration for us. If they want us to help delay it, the financier might delay and not give information, bring staff out, ask you to forgive debt.

There are dealing differences, you try to build and provide services, which may need to be a challenge between you and me.

It they bluff too much, you can tell.

You can never be friend, you can try pro quasi friendship. Sometimes you have to change hats and sometimes prove to superiors that you can do the job.

Then they are renowned.

In terms of opposition, "you've got everything", there can be weakness and you can attack on it.

There is an element of trust, you deal with someone, they are uncertain, people don't like them, if they disclose they're not sure, anxt, uncertainty, they're not happy with the assumption to go to another source for relationship or several services, so they will give you information that they think I want to hear.

They test you. If you can explain it better than them you get some respect, like in accounting.

You need to be flexible, versatile. You can't template it in different experiences. Some people are very conceited others are very helpful
Or they can create barriers.

You have to careful if they make an offer to meet you late in the evening, offer goodies you can be seen to fraternize.

It's frustrating to hit key words, certain types of documents, for example ledgers, they will say they don't call them that, they call them registers or different systems.

If you're not certain then you should not make a decision, you might go somewhere else. You have to be fairly solid, sometimes you have a gut feeling its irregular. So it's both a feeling and a confidence at meeting deadlines and to understand the business in record time.

And almost by the end of the process, almost by the end of the process you could work with. As I said before there is dialogue, negotiating, thinking on your feet, you can't know everything.

Fifth informant

Jan 7 2006 – BDM – Business Development Manager – Communications Industry, Japanese Multinational Firm

Female – Anglo Saxon, Friendly, fairly straight talker. Matter of fact, concerned about her future, health and fitness, accumulating a couple of million dollars for retirement, faithful friend, trained as a personal trainer, wants to cut down on working hours and also wants to make sure she is employable as she gets older. Is doing a number of courses such as for voice.

Aged 40 to 45, says she looks younger than her age.

What do you do?

I work for a Japanese company, it's difficult as they have their way of doing things. I work as the BDM across the business, I travel, most of it interstate quite a bit. I'm getting ready to start traveling again.

I go out with the sales reps when they meet clients, go to the meetings with them. I work across the client. The problem is a lot of them (sales reps) don't know who they're selling to, they're talking to the wrong person.

They're talking to the Communications Manager when it should be the IT. It's telephony communications they business but they're talking to the wrong person. They don't know who to talk to. So my job is to go out with them to meetings and suggest strategies.

I'm on a target of \$25 million over one and a half years. I've reached \$4 million and expect to make it. That's not the problem. The problem is it's a Japanese company and there's a way of doing things?

Is it hierarchical? Well yes sort of but it's also to do with innovation. The product we have it doesn't come up to the market compared to elsewhere then we can't expect clients to stay if we can't innovate and that goes back to the company.

So how do the sales reps take your comments? They take it well. They welcome it, some of them don't know what they're doing, they don't understand the product, they

don't know that they're selling to the wrong person. They don't understand that its telephony communications, it is communication but its IT.

So is it s tough role to be in?

I like it, I can handle it, I've done it before but I am looking at the future. I've cut down on my hours but then I'm traveling the next two weeks, just in the country but it takes my time.

Sixth informant

Former Financial Services BRM –Business Relationship Manager aged 40+, Chinese. Reserved, well traveled. Completing MBA. Extensive financial services experience but first role in sales.

Series of excerpts taken from conversations with interviewee during 2005, by telephone, in person.

if I'm out visiting clients or brokers I can't do the admin. This week I went to ...andabout two hours driving, and it's in my own car. Sometimes they want us to take the bus to meetings.

So how is everything?

You know last week I had a broker who wanted to do business for \$1million but we couldn't do it, the inside, I had worked on this broker. I went to see him in his office, he was just small with an assistant and he agreed to give me business but then he didn't. He said he would call me and when I called him and he didn't return the call I didn't want to call him again.

But we can't match the market.

I want to build relationships but how much do you do? Some of the others go out for drinks. One person told me to be successful you have to out drinking every night with the brokers. But I'm a woman and some of them are married. I tried the sports events when I asked a broker who said he couldn't go as he had a partner.

Some of them are too personal. One of my colleagues asked me if I had children and I don't think that's any of his business. Just because I'm single doesn't mean I have to go drinking all the time with them.

It's a slow market but they are pushing us.

Maybe the push is coming from higher up?

Yes it could be but it's not nice to be told you not doing well, when it's a tough market. Some of the others turn their clients business over so they're writing new business. But I've had to do cold calling.

After resignation.

You know it's all about people in the beginning when they told me the target I would have to meet I would have left but I signed the contract already. To go out in the cold and do business, it's not just about relationships, it's also price.

Seventh informant

Female, 40s, fairly confident, concerned, hardworking. A little impatient, but kind hearted. Conscientious

I answered responded to an advertisement in the paper for a part time role in assessing.

I sent in a letter and was called in for a meeting. It turned out that one of the team members had recognized my name from school even though we were in different year and had remembered me. The manager said that was one of the reasons I was selected.

The first year involved some training sessions and a few thousand dollars of work. As they explained to me the work would be sporadic and come in batches and was for people in industry wanting to supplement their income. I signed a year long contract then. At the training sessions I met other contractors like myself. We were all different, ages, male and female, from different industries and countries. I remember thinking to myself how it would be good for networking and making new contacts as well as thinking it was good to be part of a team.

Our role would be to assess industry work for organizations, third party clients who would meet only if they wanted to. Beyond an email to introduce myself to one client we were pretty much left with semi self managing role.

My point of contact in the organization was initially one of two managers. One left and then the contact person become one of three people. In Year Two some internal changes saw me dealing mainly with the manager who had originally interviewed me. She had struck me from the beginning as being a level headed sort of a person, professional yea, but kind and with a lot of consideration for other people. Assertive but kin is How I'd describe her. Year Two and the amount of work increased, but my level of contact with the key people in the organization didn't increase that much. They knew me. If I had a query about something I felt comfortable to ring them, even if it was something to do with business which was not specifically work related.

Then I was asked if I'd like to do assessing for one of the larger clients. A client who was quite particular and would read every word I wrote. I was told there would be another person assigned to the client who I knew of and agreed to do it.

The amount of work increased and there was a little bit more communication with one of the manager's staff as I fielded the odd question.

About six months ago at one of the mandatory training sessions, the key manager suggested I call her if I wanted more work.

Over time there have been problems but we've always managed to work them out. I have been fortunate in being offered additional contracts and special projects with the client which has resulted in my working in house and getting to know my client and the team even better.

This in turn has resulted in my gaining even more work just by my happening to be in the right place at the right time.

Communication definitely helps everything, but it doesn't mean that you can compromise with your work.

Interviewee	3	4	7	5
Topic				
1.Number of business relationships	Quite a few. Some are major clients	A lot.	About 5 main ones.	Many
2. Reason for number of relationships	Nature of work	Nature of work	So that you're not dependant on any one organization or person for work	Nature of work, highly competitive industry
3. Faithfulness or loyalty of companies Do you find that clients use a variety of companies or just the one ?	A bit skeptical. "They trust you a much as you trust them."	Clients don't have a choice as they are a government agency.	Sometimes you feel it, but it can change with organizations and people and it also depends how much business you're getting from them and if they're good payers. They use a lot of different contractors and people, they spread the work around.	A lot go for price
Reasons why?	Depends on size of client	Clients must work with agency, they can only seek redress from the courts or formal inquiry.	Competition. It keeps you on your toes, you can never be complacent about getting work. If a key person changes you can go from receiving a lot of work to a little, I had that experience with one organization. I	It's competitive and a down market, they can shop around.

			was pretty friendly with the director and when he left his replacement and I experienced a lot of communication problems.	
Personal efforts to retain client relationship	Sometimes you will meet them face to face, you could talk about your private life after you've known them a few years.	Have to be careful there is no conflict of interest. There can be stress.	It depends on the other person. One person I have done work with is happy to have a coffee, but others will never be that friendly. It will be email, office and phone communication only. With some I have given presents such as wine or chocolates, but it's not too personal I don't usually find out what they like to drink exactly. I've had one bad experience and that has made me pretty cautious. But then in the past when dealing with other clients part of our job was to arrange lunches with them. It's something I didn't feel very comfortable doing I might add as I am a natural born introvert. I found	Go out and visit clients, sporting events, lunches and coffees.

			<p>it really exhausting. Finding the smart restaurants, making small talk, going to breakfasts when you're not an early bird. Attending functions even when you don't want to. I tend to do the rotation thing with end of year Christmas events, I will always go the first year and then space it out after that. Last year I think I went to one event and spend about 20 minutes. I'm a bit functioned out after going to so many over the years. There was a time when I suppose I did enjoy some of them. Bank of Bermuda is one, it had the most wonderful food.</p>	
Feelings on short relationships	All depends on the financial worth of client	None	<p>It happen. 10 or 15 year ago I would be more stressed that I am today about it, but then I work with a number of organizations. Of course my preference is for longer ones it</p>	<p>Was in role a short time – about a year so no long term relationships built</p>

			<p>takes a lot of energy to initiate and start a relationship, but sometimes you find you're not a perfect match, or that you don't like the system or maybe you're not suited to the type of clients they have. Sometimes there's more work involved than you think and longer term you don't want to be paid that rate. In the past five years there have been at least two organizations where we have both found that longer term we're not great match and that's fine. You move on.</p>	
Can think about how you feel when the relationships are good?	<p>Feel like communicating more, will phone more often or email. It's easier</p>	<p>Questions whether any are good.</p>	<p>Happy it's a bit of a buzz. I feel motivated and part of a team and keen to produce good results. I'm really mindful of deadlines. You feel a bit confident as well.</p>	<p>People are keen to do business with me,</p>
On poor relationships with clients	<p>Frustration, keep a distance, be professional, don't show feelings</p>	<p>Some are arrogant. I've been insulted. Be compassionate.</p>	<p>Stressed, anxious, sometimes angry, annoyed and irritated. It's usually by a</p>	<p>Difficult to match market</p>

		Some people complain.	person. It doesn't happen often but when it does you question whether you want to keep working together. I'm sure the other person does as well. Sometimes you feel like it's an intrusion of time or into your private time as some people feel like they own you and can contact you at any time. I think they have to realize that by the nature of the work we are not dealing with life threatening situations.	
How relationships are developed further	X million dollar client will always be X million, it up to bdm.	Trust, respectful exchange of information.	You both start off with expectations, in my case I used to hope that it might lead to a full time or more permanent role. But over time I am happy that I've been working with the same core organizations for a number of years. In some cases the work or the content remains the same but the flow and communications	I want to build relationships, but a lot is on price at the moment, even though they tell you it's the brand. Some have existing clients and they can turn over the business, but I am still new. It's harder to do cold calling. I think there were people who wanted

			<p>have improved. You get to know their systems and how they like to work, they get to know you with all your frailties and admin faults at time. There's a feeling of trust and respect and belief. With some clients there is no contract, they know you will be there as you have worked with them reliably in another capacity for a couple of years. In other cases its assumed that you will be working with them next year. You start to feel comfortable but not too comfortable. The world is complex and things and people change, you can never rely on just the one relationship to give you everything for work.</p>	to do business with me
Is it important to like your client?	Need to be professional	Be professional. Always have to be careful.	No but it definitely helps. You have to look at the positives of people and also I suppose it's	Some of them are alright.

			<p>about gravitating towards people where you have some sort of synergy.</p> <p>Fundamentally I think most people are ok and at the level I deal with clients today it's not too intimate in a business sense.</p> <p>We're not on the phone to each other every day, at times there is heightened communication but it's not like when I was working in public relations. Then it became really difficult at times to work with certain people and I know I did take my work home with me. Today I think I can be a bit more detached.</p>	
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