

This issue consists of nine papers that can be divided in two groups. Although the empirical settings of the studies presented in the first five papers of the issue is varied – the focal actors represent different industrial activities, the key actors are of different size, and the exchange is taking place both within and across national borders – there is a common theme: the manoeuvring ability of a specific firm is dependent on how it utilises and is utilised by the network in which it is embedded. The four papers that follow originate from the *IMP Journal* Seminar arranged by Krzysztof Fonfara, Adam Dymitrowski, Aleksandra Hauke-Lopes, Grzegorz Leszczyński, Milena Ratajczak-Mrozek and Marek Zielinski at Poznan University of Economics and Business, in Poland in October 2017. The common theme in these four papers is the network dynamics and interaction processes in inter-organisational business relationships.

The first paper entitled “The impact of business networks on foreign subsidiaries development: Internationalizing by surfing on several global factories”, by Baraldi, Ciabuschi, Lindahl, Perna and Gregori, explores the establishment of three subsidiaries of a mid-sized Italian company in three different countries. Two issues are addressed: how the establishment and evolution of the business relationships of a firm’s subsidiaries affect their internationalisation; and how the local embeddedness of subsidiaries, but also the interconnectedness in their business networks, affect the relationships between subsidiaries and headquarters. The authors find that not only the headquarters manage key business relationships, but also the local subsidiaries are involved, with a consequence that the same business relationship plays out across several geographies, with risk of coordination problems if not tensions. This paper thereby sheds light on the link between internationalisation in different countries and the interconnectedness in industrial networks spanning these countries.

In the second paper, “Conceptualization of suppliers’ and buyers’ abilities in product development – cases from the retail industry” by Bjerhammar and Elbe, the attention is directed to buyers’ and suppliers’ ability to develop products where other features than function are important. The paper is based on original data collected through personal interviews with managers at eight major Swedish retail chains. The authors develop a conceptual framework and posit that the concepts of specification ability and description ability can shed light over and define the demand abilities of the buyer. Furthermore, the concepts translation ability, interpretation ability and implementation ability can be used to define and specify the problem-solving abilities of the supplier.

In the third paper “The impact of effectuation on small firm buying decisions” by McGowan, the author develops propositions regarding how effectuation logic impacts on the actual choice of suppliers in small and mid-sized companies. The author argues that the tendency of small firm owner-managers to follow effectuation logic leads to engagement with suppliers known from the personal and business networks of the owner. This in turn leads to developing relationships on flexible terms. The paper suggests that the processes following the effectuation logic when selecting suppliers might enable a wider choice of suppliers than may be available to large firms.

The fourth paper, “Exploring the role of business relationships in start-ups’ life cycles. Evidences from the Italian context”, by Cantù, Sepe and Tzannis, examines the role of business relationships in start-ups. In contrast with earlier research where entrepreneur’s capabilities have been considered as the critical success factor, the authors argue that the early business relationships are fundamental for the start-up’s genesis and growth. Differently from prior studies that focussed on the entrepreneur’s ability to manage social



---

relationships, this research investigates the role of business relationships in the different stages of the life cycle of a start-up. The findings of the paper are based on a longitudinal, in depth analysis of two innovative Italian start-ups. The authors conclude that interconnected business relationships can allow a start-up to access different kinds of resources required to grow. The managerial implications stressed are that the role of network embedding is critical for the start-up, and that the start-up management should consider closely the role of different business partners.

“The incubation process of mid-stage start-up companies: a business network perspective”, by Petrucci, is the fifth paper in this issue. The author is set to challenge current incubation research against the backcloth of insights from the IMP perspective that highlights the interactive nature of business incubation. The paper explores the case of an “incubation” relationship developing between a mid-stage new venture and a private business incubator analysing how and why such relationship develops and affects the new venture development. The author’s conclusions are based on a longitudinal case-study structured following the ARA model at different levels of analysis: the focal dyadic relationship, the incubation network (internal and external to the incubator), and the overall business network context. The findings are that, first, the new venture interacting with the incubator has to engage in intensive interactions in order to develop and adapt solutions to its specific needs. Second that the incubator only plays a minor role in supporting the development of key customer-supplier relationships of the new venture, but also that the new venture conveys resources from its network to the incubator.

The sixth paper – and the first of the papers presented at the *IMP Journal Seminar* at Poznan University of Economics and Business – is “Networked Interdependencies and Interaction in a Biotechnology Research Project” by Janusz, Bednarek, Komarowski, Boniecki and Engelseh. The authors address the issue of interdependencies and interactions in a project organisation involving a network of academic and business actors. Data are collected through a series of in-depth interviews and company observations and yield a single case study that provides a rich narrative of the network structure and processes involved in establishing, implementing and completing the focal project. With a focus on the resource combinations that emerge as a consequence of interaction among the project and the related network, the paper concludes that interdependencies and interaction processes change dependent on the phase of the research project development. The authors offer the concept of “integration dynamics” to analyse the project development.

The seventh paper “Quality management systems as indicators for stability and change in customer-supplier relationships” by Hallberg, Hasche, Kask and Öberg, returns to an issue that has a certain tradition in IMP research, namely the notion of stability and change as entwined aspects of business relationships. Focussing on a dyadic supplier customer relationship, the authors explore the role of quality management systems that largely affect supplier selection and the monitoring of interactions in supplier relationships. The authors conclude that since the quality management systems prescribe routines for supplier monitoring and assessment, these systems may affect the nature and longevity of supplier relationships. Based on illustrative examples from participatory and interviews, the authors analyse different types of customer-supplier relationships related to quality management systems. They find that while certified customers in most sectors only need to prove that their suppliers have procedures in place, many customers equate this with requiring that their suppliers should be certified. Certifying compliance with formal requirements has been found to be a substitute for analysis yielding deeper understandings of their suppliers’ approaches.

The eighth paper, entitled “Do sales people trust new customers because of who they are?” by Gaczek, Leszczyński and Zieliński, is based on an experimental study aiming at analysing the interplay between the characteristics of trustee and trustor in the initial stage of a business relationship. The experiment was carried out with 108 managers that took part in the study

and aimed at simulating a situation in which sales managers faced the choice of prospective customers to prioritise when entering a new market. Results of the experimental study indicate that during the pre-relationship stage salespeople declared trust towards a prospective customer without any previous interaction as a ground. Furthermore, they show that salespeople start the relationship development process by gathering clues about the trustworthiness of the potential partner organisation. It has been found that cognitive information provided to salespeople impacts interpersonal trust to a greater extent than affective communication, but this influence is moderated by trustor's propensity to trust. Adopting the perspective of the supplier who is most frequently perceived as a trustee, rather than a trustor, it complements other studies of trust emergence in business relationships.

The ninth paper is "Factors of business relationships change in agri-business input distribution channel – the case example of Polish market", by Michal Gazdecki. The author focusses on business networks around the provision of plant protection products in agribusiness and aims at identifying factors triggering change in various actors in the agri-inputs distribution channel. The study is based on in-depth interviews with managers of trade companies operating on agri-inputs products market. The author concludes that the relationships between input producers and trade companies on agri-inputs market are affected by a large number of factors but that the representatives of trade companies tend to focus, in particular, on two factors. The two are contract conditions and structural changes on the markets which manifest themselves mainly by consolidation of market entities. The author argues that successful attempts of the trading companies to improve their position in the existing network results in sales increase but also in greater intensity of interactions with other market operators and development of new relationships.

**Antonella La Rocca, Ivan Snehota and Alexandra Waluszewski**