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The Maturity of Corporate Relationship Management

Abstract: The aim of this article is to build a theoretical framework for the concept of corporate relationship management maturity. The main research method applied in this paper is an extensive literature review combined with an analysis of case studies. The article is conceptual in nature and offers a synthesis of the research material in the form of a model of corporate relationship management maturity. The proposed model can be a useful tool in separating truly relationship-oriented companies from those that are only declaratively relationship-oriented while in reality they continue to pursue a transactional approach in disguise. This brings order to the conceptual apparatus of the so-called resource-based view (RBV). It was concluded that the relationship assets that emerge in the process of multilateral dialogue between external and internal partners meet the criteria of core assets. The nature of this process sheds new light on the issue of growth in the context of the RBV. The presented conclusions can be of help to subsequent theoretical and empirical research.

Keywords: relationship assets, relationship management, resource-based view (RBV)

JEL classification codes: L250, D230

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Introduction

The search for the determinants of competitive advantage constitutes a major field of interest for economic sciences including strategic management, which is called the new theory of the company. Probably the most prominent strategic school of our times is the so-called resource-based view (RBV). RBV links competitive advantage with the proper choice and development of assets, their effective use through the improvement of strategic skills and their

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configuration into core competencies [Hamel, 2002], [Pyka, Brzóska, 2010]. Knowledge is defined as a resource of strategic importance [Hamel, Prahalad, 1999], [Maciocha, 2012], and the care for “knowledge workers” is described as a strategic domain of business activity [Otto, 2001], [Drucker, 2010]. Accordingly, customers – or more precisely relationships with customers – are discussed in the context of strategic assets [Dyche, 2002a], [Payne, Frow, 2013]. The nature of the creation, development and transfer of assets into skills and core competences and their impact on a company’s business performance are covered far less extensively, although there are attempts to parameterize them, e.g. from a marketing perspective [Shrivastava, Reibstein, Yoshi, 2006]. However, this does not make it possible to define any general, empirically proven recommendations [Obłój, 2007], [Bratnicki, 2012], in part because the RBV’s positivist foundations are still ill-equipped to explain such processes [Nonaka, Peltokorpi, 2006], [Gancarczyk 2015].

Meanwhile, one of the interesting trends in the theory and practice of the late 20th and early 21st century is a relationship approach (concept, philosophy) operationalized in customer relationship management that focuses on the most important type of stakeholder – the customer [Deszczyński, Deszczyński, 2004]. For companies pursuing this concept, it is the gateway to a competitive advantage derived from customer relationships. These are fueled by the knowledge of customer needs gained by committed employees and partners [Smith, 2006], [Szczerba, 2014] and by the proper use of information and communication technologies (ICT) [Stachowicz-Stanusch, Stanusch, 2007]. The relationship approach goes in line with the convergence of functional and global strategies [Krupski, Niemczyk, Stańczyk-Hugiet, 2009], which should be viewed in the context of the need for complex value creation, not just the sale of alienated goods or services. This would not be possible without a particular organizational philosophy (visible in both strategic management and the integrated management of company functions) and value-oriented processes linking core stakeholders [Piercy, 2003], [Rudawska, 2005], [Gummesson, 2008].

The relationship approach can be perceived as an equal theoretical and methodological direction in science management, as it contains elements of almost all the orientations of company management, including market, strategic, process, human, change, knowledge orientation (to mention only the most important) [Lichtarski, 2010]. It also requires coordination of such components as strategy, organizational structure and culture, human and knowledge resources, and processes [Gordon, 2001a]. The importance of the relationship approach is also underlined by excessive investment in licenses and implementation services with regard to PRM/CRM-class software¹ (used as a relationship strategy enabler) estimated at more than USD 100 billion [Payne, Frow, 2013, p. 3].

¹ PRM/CRM – Partner Relationship Management/Customer Relationship Management – class of ICT systems used as tools supporting relationship marketing activities, e.g. in the distribution network, with regard to end customers, etc.

In general, the essence of the change from the transactional to the relationship approach is illustrated in many Polish and international sources [Christopher, Payne, Ballantyne, 1996], [Dyche, 2002b], [Mazurek-Łopacińska, 2002], [Buchnowska, 2006]. However, most authors focus on a static examination of differences that should ensure a competitive advantage for a company focused on building relationships. The division between relationship- and transactional-oriented companies is also blurred and declarative as most companies emphasize their interest in the satisfaction and loyalty of customers, employees and other partners, but this does not mean that this priority is present in their day-to-day business. Numerous research studies show that up to 70% of companies assess their relationship management projects in terms of failure due to some repeated mistakes [Ward, Rolland, Patterson, 2009, p. 2]². Such clarifications may be useful for specific projects, but they do not answer the general question of whether there is a relevant correlation between the relationship approach and competitive advantage.

Taking the RBV as a starting point, the aim of this article is to build a theoretical framework for the concept of corporate relationship management maturity. As a result of extensive literature screening, combined with a search for examples from business practice portraying major issues discussed in the article, a model of corporate relationship management maturity has been developed. This model and the accompanying questionnaire (Annex 1) can be useful tools in separating truly relationship-oriented companies from those that are only declaratively relationship-oriented, while in reality they still pursue the transactional approach in disguise. Dividing one group from the other may give additional strong evidence to confirm the hypothesis that competitive advantage is shaped by the development of the relationship-based strategy and the implementation of a business model aimed at creating and using relationship assets. Therefore in the field research this author intends to conduct, a strong correlation between corporate relationship management maturity and market success is expected to be revealed. The author also intends to start a discussion to bring some additional insight useful in the further development of the proposed model.

Model Conceptual Framework and the Role of Relationship Assets

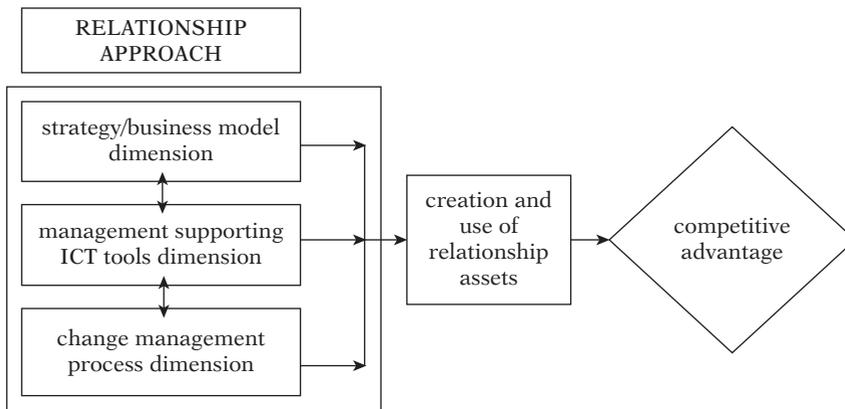
Owing to the author's previous publications [Deszczyński, 2011], [Deszczyński, Fonfara, 2014], it is assumed that corporate relationship approach activities are interlinked with three major dimensions: the development of the relationship strategy and business model; proper use of information and

² Reports by various research institutions show that the percentage of implementation projects ending in failure may approach 70%: **2001** Gartner Group: 70%, **2002** Selling Power, CSO Forum: 69.3%, **2005** AMR Research: 18%, **2006** AMR Research: 31%, **2007** Economist Intelligence Unit: 56%, **2009** Forrester Research: 47%, **2011** Standish Group: 63%, **2013** Merkle Group: 63%, **2014** C5 Insight: 30%–60% even for re-launch projects.

communication technologies (ICT); and change management to unlock the process of creating and developing relationship assets (see Fig. 1; conceptual framework).

Before the nature and importance of particular dimensions can be discussed, the main assumption presented in this model – that the creation and use of relationship assets is positively correlated with competitive advantage – has to be commented on.

Figure 1. Model Conceptual Framework



Source: Own work.

J.B. Barney, in his article published in 1991 in the *Journal of Management*, described strategic assets as valuable, rare, inimitable and well organized [Obłój, 2007, p. 149], [Urbanowska-Sojkin, Banaszyk, Witczak, 2007, p. 178]. Possession of such assets and the ability to use, develop and defend them is, according to the RBV, a proven way of achieving a competitive advantage [Peteraf, 1993, pp. 181–182]. The most evident example of a strategic asset is knowledge. Owing to the fact that knowledge is specific to every organization, it is commonly described on the basis of some general examples or with the use of concrete case studies. Meanwhile, relationship assets are a phenomenon that is even harder to depict and at the same time they seem to be an important knowledge-determining factor. In the modern economy, knowledge is no longer predominantly a Schumpeterian flash of entrepreneurial genius [Noga, 2009, pp. 195–202]. Even company founders do not operate in a business vacuum; they are strongly influenced by the socioeconomic environment and their options are shaped by the relations they maintain. Moreover, relationship assets not only induce knowledge creation (i.e. thanks to the supplier-buyer partnership) but they condition the chances to use it (e.g. thanks to personal favor, engagement and trust) [Morgan, Hunt, 1994, p. 22], [Doney, Cannon, 1997, p. 37]. Thus relationship assets can be defined as intangible resources, an effect of a well-thought-out process of continuous interactions

(formal/informal – B2B market; general/individual – B2C market) that create useful knowledge and lead to the development of positive associations with the organization, its brands and representatives. This, in turn, produces benefits for individuals and reinforces the competitive position of the company itself [Deszczyński, 2014a].

This definition outlines three major issues. One is that the nature of relationship assets implies that they are created in the process of communication. Another issue is that there are both internal and external parties involved in this process, and the third issue is that their existence can be identified by the creation of knowledge with economic utility value. Moreover, relationship assets emerge as an accumulated sum of experiences, trust, commitment and mutual learning processes developed over an extended period of time. Therefore they cannot be bought unless the whole company is taken over with its entire staff left intact. Imitation is also impossible because of a unique configuration of subjects, highly individualized nature of relations, and the time of their creation. Even the formal owner of relationship assets would not be able to restore them if they were lost for some reason (e.g. massive staff reduction and renewed recruitment of the same people). An attempt to imitate a successful relationship-oriented business model may be counterproductive. For example, an attempt to copy Ritz Carlton's legendary level of customer service, described as *Mystique* [Deszczyński, 2014b, p. 554], by a mediocre hotel chain would only endanger its position in its market segment. Hence the creation of the right environment to grow fruitful relations manageable at the corporate level is a goal of strategic importance.

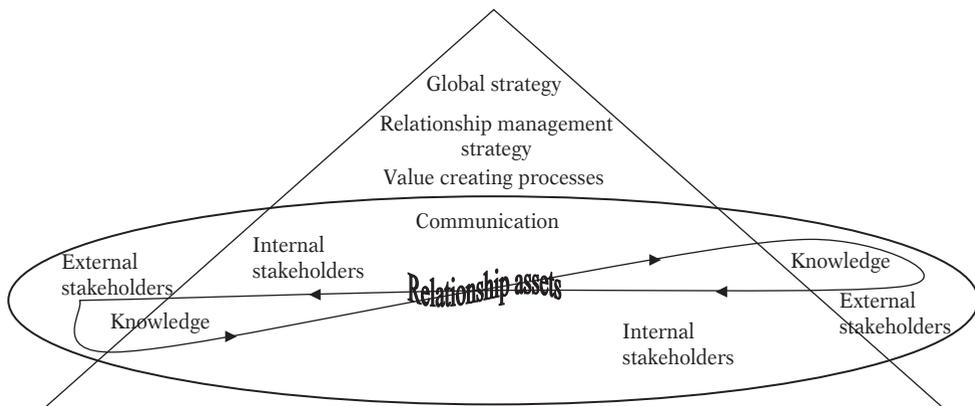
Strategy/business Model Dimension

In accordance with the project's conceptual framework (see Fig. 1), the model of corporate relationship management maturity includes activities in three interdependent dimensions: the development of the relationship strategy and business model; proper use of information and communication technologies (ICT); and the change management process. These dimensions constitute an organizational infrastructure that determines the development and use of relationship assets and therefore requires detailed examination.

The strategy/business model dimension (see Fig. 2) is the best covered element of the relationship approach in the literature. Most authors agree that relationship management is an important alternative to the traditional, transactional-oriented model aimed at maximizing short-term economic effects [Furtak, 2003], [Światowiec, 2006], [Baran, Galka, 2013]. Relationship management is perceived as a bundle of strategies and methods focusing on strengthening the loyalty of a customer or partner and on reducing the operating costs of sales, promotion and acquisition [Reichheld, Markey, 2012]. Other researchers view relationship management in terms of an organizational philosophy oriented at value creation [Piercy, 2003], [Rudawska, 2005]. Still

others see it as a managerial process aimed at meeting the goals of shareholders by reinforcing relations with selected customers and partners [Doyle, 2003]. These characteristics make it possible to clearly distinguish relationship management from functional and operational marketing strategies and to interpret it in the light of strategic management [Tvede, Ohnemus, 2001]. Thus customer or partner relationship management is part of incremental strategic management [Deszczyński, 2011] and should be interlinked with global strategy. Moreover, global strategy should also be inspired by basic relationship guidelines (mutual compatibility is needed) [Payne, Frow, 2013]. Consequently, corporate mission statements and visions should contain references to the needs and loyalty of not only customers but also employees and to profitability interpreted in terms of a successful connection between the customer and the company in the value creation chain. Although such declarations often remain on paper [Lipton, 2004], companies that fail to officially articulate them should have smaller chances of introducing mature relationship strategies. In fact, a Gallup meta-analysis – of 49,928 business units across 192 organizations representing 49 different industries in 34 countries – shows that there is a correlation between the mission statement and corporate performance. As employees move beyond the basics of work engagement and view their contribution to the organization more broadly, they tend to be more loyal, take proactive steps to create a safe environment, have higher productivity, and become respected partners in customer dialogue [Groscurth, 2014].

Figure 2. Strategy/business Model Dimension



Source: Own work.

Another indicator of a company's strategic orientation is its main goals. These are usually full of general market or financial KPIs (e.g. market share, profit before taxes) that show the company's overall results and predominately focus on ex-post performance. Meanwhile, market leadership and sound

finances begin with customer satisfaction and loyalty as well as average relationship profitability. This means that employee satisfaction and fluctuation rates as well as quality and staff engagement indicators (i.e. number of innovation projects or bottom-up initiatives) should be measured. In the case of the biggest entities, the quality of the business network should be observed and managed as well. This can again be linked with figures such as the number and ROI of joint innovation projects, patents registered by suppliers in a given period, and the number of complaints associated with the sub-products or services of a given partner³.

A company's strategic goals reveal the truth about its business model, which constitutes the logic of value creation and capture. It also indicates in what direction the company should develop in the future and how this should happen [Urbanowska-Sojkin, Banaszyk, 2004], [Ricart, Casadeu-Masanell, 2009]. The core characteristics of the relationship business model are [Galbreath, Rogers, 1999, p. 169], [Injazz, Popovich, 2003, p. 681–682], [Adamczyk, 2012]:

- long-term perspective,
- reciprocity of internal and external relations,
- partner dialogue,
- orientation on the value creation process.

One of the customer relationship management mantras is an empirically proven belief that winning new customers is much more expensive than retaining loyal ones [Fonfara, 1999, p. 104]. And truly loyal customers are the engaged ones. Customer engagement can only be built through two-way, pro-active communication supported by the practical enforcement of the 360° customer's view concept and the non-zero sum game value exchange concept. According to the first concept, a company should effectively organize and connect all its members (more broadly, entities in its network) to enable registration and use of customer data in every contact. This requires the company to conclude sales only if the cost for the customer is balanced by the value of the product/services satisfying their needs in a possibly complete way – thus creating a win-win situation (customer value creating chain coupled with corporate value creating chain) [Reichheld, 2001]. Perhaps the best example of the practical execution of the non-zero sum game value exchange concept is the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) methodology, which is becoming popular in the B2B market [Roda, Garetti, 2014]. Companies that apply TCO may not be the cheapest in the first run, but what they offer is designed to reduce the risks and costs once the product/service is in use, which gives them a competitive edge globally.

The focal point in the relationship business model is the process of creating value. Although there is a common assumption that this process should be customer-centric (oriented at creating customer value) and there are models

³ The issue of relationship performance indicators will be discussed later in this article (see: Change management dimension).

of process maturity (i.e. five-stage process maturity model CMM) [Auksztol, Chomuszko, 2012], the perception of an organization in the context of this process encounters resistance as it opposes intra-functional divisions [Dyche, 2002b], [Gentle, 2004], [Baran, Galka, 2013]. The business model should deliver the general value creation chain concept and define the basic rational and emotional needs of important customer groups and the ways in which a company can use its assets in a profitable way. For example, in the case of Audi AG, rational needs include mobility, quality, reliability, the price-value-ratio, safety, and residual value. Emotional needs include perceivable prestige, innovations, history, glamour, motor sports, top service and the overall sense of success [Urban, 2007].

The general customer-centric alignment of a company should be embodied in several standard CRM business processes managed by accountable process owners. The most important are [Deszczyński, Fonfara, 2014, p. 102]:

- customer dialogue,
- lead management,
- cross-/up-selling,
- loyalty management,
- quality management,
- anti-churn management.

The customer dialogue process involves communication standards that reinforce the desired brand image in every contact. This goal is implemented by means of a traditional promotion mix and direct and/or personalized tools. The role of CRM is to facilitate the dialogue reaching the right recipients with the appropriate message at the right time. Lead management is the systematic registration and processing of information about customers' interest in what a company has to offer through the sales funnel. Cross-/up-selling is about offering selective supplementary advisory services based on profiling customer needs. Loyalty management is the enrichment of after-sales service with tangible and intangible tokens of corporate generosity and valuable offers. Quality management is a process encompassing satisfaction/loyalty research aimed at capturing the general malfunctions of the organization (in the perception of customers, employees and external partners) and the prospective loyalty of contacted individuals. Anti-churn management is about detecting and counteracting possible customer defections including complaint management and customer trust recovery. Anti-churn and quality management processes should constitute the knowledge basis for corporate resilience, which is achieved through change management efforts.

The processes listed in the previous paragraph do not mark a corporate orientation on relationships alone. In a mature relationship-driven company, standard HR management activities should be redefined. One important goal is to identify key groups of employees with one or more of the following distinguishing marks:

- possession of VRI skills (valuable, rare, costly to imitate) [Barney, 1995], [Rothaermel, 2012],

- high potential for the development of sought-after skills,
- extraordinary commitment to entrusted duties.

The employees of the first group are current competitive advantage carriers, while the high-potential group promises to sustain or gain a superior position in the future. The third group comprises employees who are not necessarily innovative but keep the standards high without extensive control efforts and contribute to a good working attitude, which is the foundation of an effective corporate culture. The goal of a company would be to copy the same processes as in customer portfolio management to workforce management. In practice, this would mean nurturing relationships with the best employees, trying to advance others to join one or more of the aforementioned groups, and ceasing cooperation with the least valuable individuals. Only by organizing its assets in such a way can a company reach a state of ability to develop and sustain a competitive advantage as described in J.B. Barney's VRIO model [Barney, 1995]. Several methods can be of help in employee relationship management:

- employee development plans,
- individually tailored training,
- internal training opportunities,
- tutoring or mentoring opportunities,
- innovation projects.

Employee development plans seem to be commonly used, especially by large companies, yet in order to be effective, they cannot take the form of a bureaucratic exercise. They should be developed as a result of a genuine interest on the part of the employer in an employee's future assisted by the HR department [Lipman, 2013]. As a result, training opportunities should be offered to link an employee's prescribed and desired capabilities with their personal interests and likes. An important kind of development should be internal learning by staff. It can take the form of training opportunities prepared by corporate knowledge owners, which can be included in individual development plans. Less experienced colleagues can thus become more independent or versatile. ICT-assisted explicit knowledge (know-what) codification processes should be introduced to make learning even more accessible, especially in multi-site organizations.

In addition to the standard learning-by-doing process, talented employees including junior managers (junior manager candidates) should be granted tutoring programs or even assigned active mentors [Soniewicki, 2015]. A study based on an analysis of international databases of more than 1,200 high achievers shows that many young managers are dissatisfied with their employers largely because they are not provided with training opportunities, mentoring or coaching exceeding standard on-the-job learning [Hamori, Cao, Koyuncu, 2013]. This could also be a welcomed opportunity for the experienced members of an organization as their daily work could become more varied and their self-esteem would be boosted. As a result, tacit knowledge (know-how) should be captured, transferred and developed in a consistent way.

At Advanced Semiconductor Engineering Inc., a leading global provider of semiconductor manufacturing services, every employee is expected to deliver at least one teaching material within six months of employment according to a reference sample. On average, engineers spend 50 hours a year on different forms of training including self-training. Technicians spend more than 60 hours a year, whereas management and new staff contribute more than 120 hours a year [ASE, 2011, p. 57]. Such an approach supports communication and the culture of sharing, which improves the amount and structure of knowledge [Ying-Yung, Sun Quae, Chin-Tsang, 2006].

Innovation projects are an eminent sign of a company's ability to progress. Although there is a general trend toward open innovations [Kotler, 2008], self-creation is the basis for successful competition. In B2B industries, the best long-term effect of cooperation is expected to occur if technical and organizational competences/potential of all the parties are similar in scale and scope before cooperation starts [Moverly, Oxley, Silverman, 1998]. All types of innovations (product, process, organization, and marketing innovations) [Dymitrowski, 2014, p. 26] are affected by the value based on relationship assets. The potential for optimization can be found everywhere, also at the level of front-office personnel who are in direct contact with customers or at the level of line staff who verify the prescribed procedures in their daily work. Therefore all employees should be encouraged to come up with innovative ideas, assisted in proceeding with them, and rewarded for measurable outcomes. One effective tool to achieve this can be innovation contests or co-creation initiatives. For example, BMW, Daimler and Siemens have launched co-creation projects that have engaged thousands of employees and produced hundreds of ideas with potential business value [HYVE, 2011].

A company's external relations are traditionally associated with customers. Since every company, whether relationship- or transactional-oriented, is interested in its market, a clear distinction in the marketing strategy has to be made between these two types of entities. First, relationship-oriented companies have to know their customers well. However, maintaining a customer database is not enough. As already indicated, one of the key concepts related to relationship marketing is the 360° customer view, which is aimed at the continuous codification of customer knowledge and makes it possible to identify key customer groups. This includes advanced segmentation based on a variety of criteria. Ritz Carlton has made this a golden rule by training and motivating its people whatever position they have, to register every single piece of information on customer preferences to the benefit of customers who can enjoy tailored services regardless of the location they travel to [SMPIS, 2009]. Ultimately, the company should be able to follow the "who-what-when" rule at both the corporate and individual employee levels. The composition of this rule is as follows:

- Who is your customer (the ability to identify and connect to a given type of customer)?

- What does your customer need (the ability to define what the customer values most and what your company can provide in terms of the best suited products/services but also in terms of behavioral needs such as personal risk reduction, workload transfer, perceivable prestige and differentiation)?
- When is your customer ready to make a choice (the ability to track the individual purchasing cycle or effectively use opportunities for the fulfillment of new needs)?

Customers are obviously not the only external stakeholders a company should maintain relations with. According to various models, partners such as suppliers, intermediaries, the labor market, competitors, influential institutions, and public opinion makers should be taken into consideration [Payne, 1997, p. 31], [Fonfara, 2014, p. 78]. Mature companies should keep a reasonable balance between efforts and benefits in managing relations with all these partners based on the extent they contribute to the customer value chain or affect their market position. In this context, the “who-what-when” rule can be generalized as follows:

- Who is my partner?
- What kind of added value can we create together (by combining input and output)?
- When is the right time to initiate and cease cooperation?

Answering the abovementioned questions in a consistent manner requires well-considered strategies of individualization and mass customization [Payne, Frow, 2009]. Both deal with tailoring the value that the company wants to create for and with its customers and other partners. Individualization is the practical implementation of the 1–1 marketing principle whereby the company’s range of products and services is adjusted to the maximum possible extent thanks to direct communication between the offer-making and offer-taking sides. A vivid example of this can be a premium travel agency customer planning a vacation with the help of a personal concierge agent. Obviously, such a service cannot be available for every client, so the personalization strategy has to set the rules for selecting the best customers and dedicated, well-trained and motivated employees combined with other resources and infrastructure. These can include variable physical and intangible elements combined with flexible processes enabling customer servicing personnel to effectively deliver on promises and solve customers’ problems.

Another cost-effective way of improving the relevance of the relationships in a company’s portfolio is mass customization [Gilmore, Pine, 1997]. It can be applied to a wider customer base and include some elements of personal service with ready-to-buy customers while ensuring tailored communication, offer enrichment and loyalty management to others. In the tourist industry, for example, it can take the form of pro-active contact via the preferred communication channel with a customer seen entering a phase of high interest in a booking with a proposal based on his previous choices and behavioral profile (e.g. a two-week summer trip once a year to quiet locations with lots

of sightseeing opportunities). Mass customization can also be successfully applied in the case of relations where the emotional brand potential is weak (e.g. many types of commodities) or in businesses that are peripheral to the customer's interest (e.g. industrial supply goods). However, mass customization cannot account for every direct marketing activity. Spam-like campaigns ignoring the "who-what-when" rule are eminent signs of relationship management immaturity.

A common element that links internal and external relationship management is the knowledge created in the process of communication. Knowledge creation is not a traditional input-output sequenced process but a spiral movement that goes through interrelated organizational units accompanying other processes with more specified problem-solving objectives [Nonaka, 1994], [Nonaka, Peltokorpi, 2006]. Therefore there is a temptation to overdue time investment in knowledge sharing (by delaying customer data registration, neglecting knowledge database maintenance, and optimizing internal training). This natural susceptibility to prioritize leads to myopic disinvestment in a company's intellectual potential, which basically comprises human capital (own employees) and customer and organizational capital [Urbanowska-Sojkin, Banaszyk, Witczak, 2007]. Therefore it seems that corporate knowledge management should have a caretaker. Different organizational contexts may influence the definite design of knowledge management advocacy. In the largest organizations it can take the form of a special position like Chief Knowledge Officer (20% – 25% of Fortune 500 companies currently have CKOs) [McKeen, James, Staples, 2001] or specific positions located throughout the company (80%/33% of Fortune 500/Fortune 1000 companies have KM staff) [Bontis, 2002]. Their main task is to create an organizational background for the transfer of knowledge into corporate assets. This can be done by creating a positive environment and procedures for the externalization and internalization of tacit knowledge and for the codification of explicit knowledge or/and active participation in these processes. In the smallest entities, it can be the owner acting as a knowledge hub, trainer and coach all at the same time. Nonetheless the organizational embedment of knowledge management is one of the crucial indicators of a mature strategic relationship management alignment.

Management-supporting ICT Tools Dimension

Even though pure technological matters are beyond the scope of management science, the proper use of ICT should be included as a vital part of a corporate relationship management maturity model. First, ICT plays a prominent role in relationship management. Small entities may make do with limited relations, simple processes and a single site team using popular data sheets, but the operationalization of advanced relationship strategies in bigger organizations with multiple groups of stakeholders would not be possible without modern technology [Greenberg, 2010]. Also worthy of note

are social media services that have revolutionized the ways of communication with a wide customer base and have enhanced collaboration with other partners [Deszczyński, 2012]. Second, mismanagement in implementing ICT tools is one of the main reasons companies fail in their customer relationship management efforts [Dyche, 2002b], [Lovelock, Wirtz, 2007]. Third, the role of information management in improving the effectiveness of management was noticed long before PRM/CRM-class systems were invented [Bondarska, Szafrąńska, Goliński, 2010]. In the McKinsey 7S model, systems are one of the factors influencing strategy implementation [Stoner, Freeman, Gilbert, 1999].

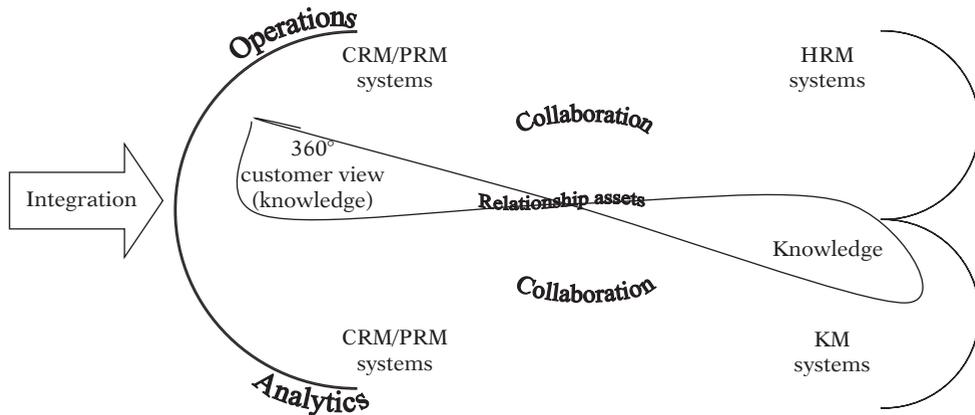
In the literature on the subject there are two approaches to ICT tools. The first approach brings some general remarks on the role and characteristics of management supporting systems. They are expected to collect actual and complete information and make it accessible to authorized individuals [Penc, 2008]. More precisely, relationship management systems should capture the whole partnership lifecycle and provide real-time access to information [Gentle, 2004]. On the other hand, many publications focus on vendors and individual system modules [Buchnowska, 2006] or describe detailed technical issues [Greenberg, 2004], [Baran, Galka, 2013]. It seems that if one adopts a three-level structure of management science, the first approach can be identified with a theoretical-cognitive part and the second with a practical-implementation part. This leaves the room for a theory-project part to “optimize science law” [Banaszyk, 2011] with the purpose of developing a theoretical framework that can be applied by organizations of different form and size.

In this context, ICT systems have several goals (see Fig. 3). The first goal is the practical execution of the 360° customer view concept. In consequence, every point of contact with the customer has to be integrated by some kind of ICT system. However, the digitization of information does not bring much benefit if the customer profile is fragmented, and this often happens in a multi-system environment. Therefore the integration of different digital data sources in one repository is of crucial importance. For example, automaker Volkswagen, in its dealership network in Poland, uses a CRM system and an inventory-accounting system that does not play a central role in customer relationship management. However, the latter system stores important financial data that make it possible to track customer profitability, which is why Volkswagen has decided to partially integrate both applications [Deszczyński, 2015].

CRM/PRM-class systems have to support customer-facing processes that have been discussed in terms of the strategy/business model dimension at both the operational and analytical levels [Wahlberg, Strandberg, Sundberg, 2009]. This task requires fast data processing and retrieval as well as workflow automation to replace offline and paper databases – as in the case of line employee reporting, which should be based not on excessive paperwork but on user activity statistics and performance indicators. Managerial tasks such as sales forecasting can also be assisted by access to streamlined data and transparent reporting. TIM Group, a company featured in *The Sunday Times*

Tech Track 100 league table, decided to pursue such a policy after it found that its rapidly growing customer base and sales pipelines could not be managed by a mix of personal spreadsheets, rolodexes, shared drives, and MS Outlook [TIM Group, 2009]. But this approach is not restricted to multinational enterprises because world-class CRM/PRM solutions are nowadays available in the SAAS⁴ model for less than USD 500 a year per user [SugarCRM, 2015].

Figure 3. ICT Dimension in Relationship Approach



Source: Own work.

The highlight of the ICT analytical application is the “big data approach.” It can refer to almost any sphere of human existence from biotechnology to psychology. In terms of management it means collecting and storing evidence of consumer or other stakeholder activities. It is clear that the better the 360° customer view concept is applied the more data can be analyzed, yet this does not mean that the analytical capabilities are a simple extension of the operational system. Far more important than data quantity is its granularity and the ability to master the process of extracting and utilizing knowledge that can enhance the competitiveness of a company [George, Haas, Pentland, 2014], [Erveless, Fukawa, Swayne, 2015]. In terms of relationship management, this means delivering answers to “who-what-when” questions in advance rather than ex-post so that the company can take full advantage of its market opportunities and counteract threats. At Maybank, Malaysia’s largest financial group, an analytical CRM initiative facilitating predictive modeling for product development and customer retention has made it possible to improve, tenfold, the results of marketing campaigns. As a knock-on effect, acceptance of the central lead management process in the bank’s local branches has risen from 50% to 90% and the number of customers contacted

⁴ SAAS (System as a Service) refers to completely outsourced ICT services based on a periodical fee instead of traditional license purchase.

has grown by 70% [Krivda, 2011]. The overall effect on customer and line employee satisfaction must have been huge as the standard dropped lead rate accounts for approximately 30% [Deszczyński, 2013, p. 28], [Deszczyński, Mielcarek, 2015, pp. 26–28]. The interdependence of different relationship maturity dimensions is particularly evident in this case.

Companies truly devoted to the relationship approach cannot confine themselves to external stakeholder data management. Moreover, in the light of the RBV, it seems only natural to apply ICT in human resource management (HRM) and knowledge management (KM). HRM automation seems to be somewhat a contradiction since relations should be based on direct contact, intimacy and trust. Especially in small entities without a specialized HR function, this may seem to be an overkill. But as the company grows, effective hiring and employee selection may be impossible without a database of applicants, trainees and ex-employees. Smooth replacement processes are essential given the fact that the effective onboarding of a newcomer may last from three months up to a year [Stibitz, 2015]. In addition, technology has a vital role to play in human resource development, enabling effective employee portfolio management focused on skill development and substitution, training and engagement. Norwich Union has introduced an HR information system that enables its managers to easily access administrative data and performance ratings. The company has also decentralized some standard procedures thanks to employee self-service. This has redefined the HR function, enabling the company to focus on strategic activities such as the creation of a learning environment and assistance in knowledge management [Storey, 2007].

Some studies suggest that ICT plays a minor role in KM, especially in tacit knowledge proliferation, which seems to be predominately locked in contacts and relations between customers and employees and within a group of employees [Maciocha, 2012]. But ICT perceived as a sole tool to improve employee loyalty, engagement or any other managerial problem will always fail. Nevertheless, in larger companies, where multifunctional employees are replaced by specialized ones and functional departments or multi-sites emerge, an organizational memory can hardly be created and maintained. Only structured knowledge can be viewed as a source of competitive advantage at the corporate level [Davenport, Prusak, 1998]. It should take the form of a know-what but also know-who database. The latter makes it possible to identify units and individuals who possess the know-how, while also making it easier for them to multiply their knowledge by means of personal development described in the strategy/business model dimension. This is of crucial importance as some studies show that up to 74% of corporate knowledge is inaccessible and 68% of mistakes are reproduced [Alavi, Leidner, 2001, pp. 107–136]. Hard Rock Café, an international restaurant and hotel chain, has introduced such a process in order to cope with an increasing number of customer inquiries dealing with their 192 locations, each of which is a potential sightseeing destination for music fans [Hard Rock, 2016]. A previous system based on repeated

correspondence between customer office and restaurant managers, in light of a vast number of such contacts (more than 56,000 customer inquiries in 2011 alone), was supplemented by a process of question and answer categorization and registration. The outcome was enhanced service standards within the same team [Microsoft, 2011].

The conversion of information into data and the conversion of data into knowledge facilitated by technology is designed to not only improve the storage, search and retrieval of knowledge, but also support communication [Teo, Devadoss, Pan, 2006], [Lindner, Wald, 2011], [Deng, 2012]. Consequently, communication support (known as collaborative CRM/PRM) is a third major feature of relationship management ICT architecture. The term collaboration can be literally applied to interactions with internal stakeholders where it can take the form of file sharing and editing, online project management, restricted discussion forums, chat and improvement idea submissions. Such functions should be part of KM. They are, however, unlikely to ensure the same level of mutual trust and engagement with wider groups of external stakeholders, which should rather be consulted or informed. The goal of informing customers and business partners can be mastered via traditional web services (i.e. personalized accounts and newsletters) and social media services. Especially the latter play a significant role as a platform for engaging potential and existing customers and business partners who may eventually establish closer relations with the company. Consultations can use discussion forums and chats as well as online surveys and pools occasionally taking the form of "contestification" such as co-creation and crowd-sourcing [Schrage, 2011] or other forms of business-delivered entertainment like gamification [Zichermann, Cunningham, 2011]. For example, Samsung, thanks to its *Samsung Nation* application, which awards most the active participants with expertise points and badges, has made it possible to increase the number of product reviews by 500% [Swallow, 2012].

All the aforementioned tools should be applied as a coherent communication platform aimed at the wider public, yet marketing communication is not the only factor behind relationship management maturity. ICT support should also facilitate the incorporation of knowledge, which can be obtained in the form of trends, marketing research or individually relevant data. The latter can be imported to standard CRM/PRM systems adding more behavioral context to highest-interest groups. The integration of social profiles and other online sources is frequently called S-CRM (Social Customer Relationship Management) and is usually offered in the SAAS mode. Therefore additional costs can only be justified if they are applied selectively to upper-tier customers and partners and promising prospects. InsideView is an example of an intelligent data provider that relies on multi-sourcing, triangulation and semi-automated validation. One of its clients, O'Neal Steel, has reduced lead qualification time by 66% and secured the biggest USD 850 million account in the company's almost 100-year history within the first week after their co-operation started [InsideView, 2015].

The examples of O'Neal Steel, Samsung and Maybank show that ICT can improve a company's results in a significant way. But technology needs to be properly embedded in an organization to avoid a situation in which the tools would dominate over the purposes they should serve. Therefore CRM/PRM projects cannot be treated as predominately ICT initiatives but they must engage system beneficiaries from all departments including its future ambassadors. These key personalities should use their authority to promote the idea of relationship management and its supporting tools along with key system users and process owners. They should also actively influence the requirements of relationship management with regard to its definition and functionalities. Furthermore, overall project management should be entrusted to a business- (not technical-) oriented manager reporting directly to the CXO level (or alternatively to a high-profile manager with access to top management). Business sponsorship should ensure proper communication and goal setting; it should also provide ongoing guidance, decision execution and financing. Such a prominent anchoring of CRM/PRM activities should transfer them from a mid-priority ICT application implementation project to the domain of strategic initiatives bringing change to the whole organization. Meanwhile, a lack of business sponsorship/failure of leadership is listed among the top reasons information technology projects [Whittaker, 1999, p. 26] or projects in general fail [Ashkenas, 2015].

Change Management Dimension

The very first attempts at operationalizing the relationship approach were exclusively related to ICT issues with little impact on overall company performance [Gordon, 2001]. On the eve of the 21st century an alarmingly low success ratio of CRM-class system implementations was the background of change in thinking and the reason for a return to the fundamentals of relationship marketing as a starting point for all activities of that kind. It was not until recently that a newer approach emerged underlining the fact that the overall organizational performance level has to be elevated to pursue a relationship strategy and benefit from automation. This may require changes to affect all departments and all employees [Deszczyński, 2009], [Payne, Frow, 2013]. The relationship strategy and business model and ICT supporting tools will be successful only if the interests of employees – one of the most important stakeholder groups within a company – are taken into account [Reichheld, 1996]. Employees are those who create relationship assets in day-to-day practice serving external and internal customers. Much as customers, employees nowadays tend to be more demanding, individualistic and less loyal to their employer [Smith, 2006]. They have to be treated by the company as partners or they will be incapable of engaging customers in dialogue. In addition, organizational infrastructure needs to be adjusted to support this dialogue and make it more profitable [Mruk, Stępień, 2007].

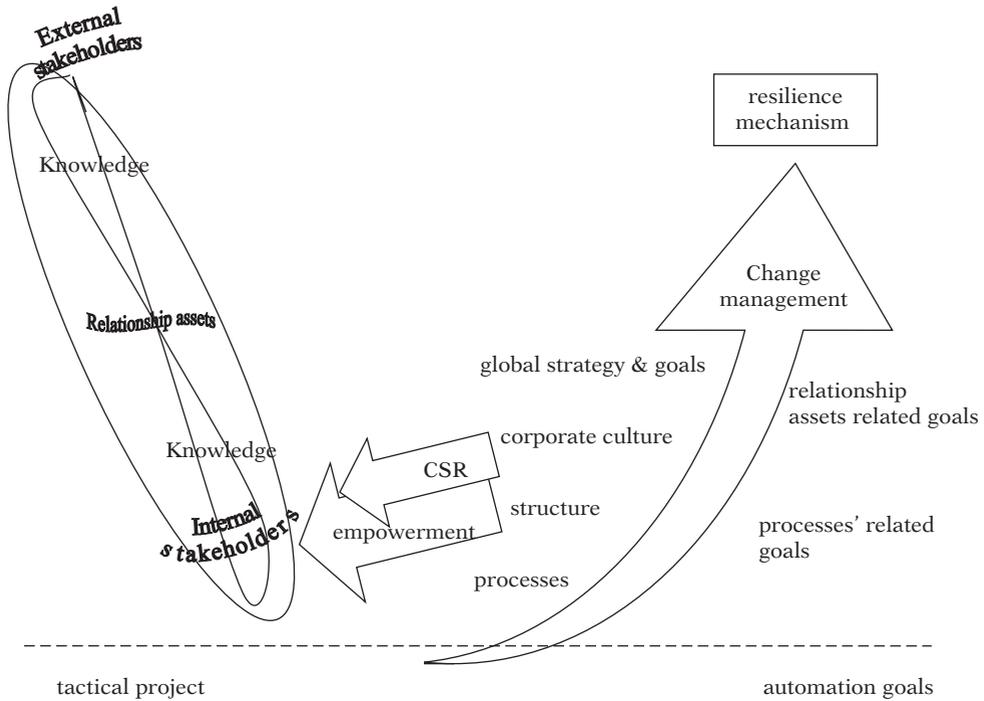
The transition from the transactional marketing paradigm to the relationship approach should start with a global strategy (see Fig. 4). As mentioned, selective use of some alienated relationship marketing techniques in the same organizational structure is highly ineffective. Hence in relationship-oriented companies the mission statement and vision should not only reflect the customer-focus and interests of employees on paper, but it should often be communicated and inspire company policy makers. The easiest way to learn if employees know what their company stands for and if they are inspired by its challenges in everything they do, is to ask them if they believe their CEO is. Strategic goals should reflect and parameterize the journey to vision achievement by considering short-term performance indicators in management. Gallup Institute research shows that companies that score above 50% on either employee or customer engagement tend to deliver 70% higher financial results than companies that score poorly on both measures. Moreover, companies that score above 50% on both engagement measures outperform others by 240% [Robison, 2008].

There is another important aspect of strategic management – that of corporate culture. Corporate culture influences the typical behavior of employees. The relationship management paradigm requires lifting command and control culture as it is not effective by the point the company starts to assess its employees as partners [Stankiewicz, Moczulska, 2012]. Typical behavior in traditional organizations includes protecting a company's reputation, hiding mistakes, micromanagement, and susceptibility to flattery and nepotism [Michalik, Mruk, 2008, pp. 123–131], [Kegan, Lahey, Fleming, Miller, 2015, p. 148]. For the purpose of this model it is assumed that a supportive, flexible corporate culture will bring such values and behavior patterns as care for the interest of customers, fellow employees, owners and partners, appreciation of human beings, and willingness for change, even in the context of some risks to be taken and process-orientation [Kotter, Heskett, 1992], [Potoczek, 2007].

It seems that in contemporary business practice employee empowerment is the best method for activating the potential of companies' HR resources. The basic pillars of empowerment are rooted in the strategic and ICT dimension of corporate relationship maturity and include [Johnson, Redmond, 1998], [Smith, 2006]:

- distribution of high quality information,
- authority to make the most of decisions based on set goals, time limits and budget constraints,
- encouragement to innovate,
- shift in managerial activities from detailed work distribution and control toward strategic planning and leadership.

Figure 4. Change Management Dimension in Relationship Approach



Source: Own work.

Empowerment is not just delegating authority to perform prescribed tasks, but granting employees freedom in how they want to attain a defined goal or even what goals they consider worth achieving in a given strategic and self-development context. Such an approach promotes self-initiative, autonomous decision-making, innovation, creativity and engagement. A relationship-oriented company will introduce specific measures to enable fast bottom-up communication, internal dialogue infrastructure, an innovative project granting system, and a system of management appraisal based on integrity, engagement and team satisfaction. These initiatives cannot come only for their own sake but should be applied to tackle specific problems or help exploit specific potential.

HCL, an Indian IT giant with annual sales revenues of over USD 7 billion and more than 110,000 employees from 100 nationalities operating across 31 countries, has been implementing the idea of empowerment to support its strategic goals for more than a decade. One of the company's numerous initiatives is *LeadGen*. It focuses on delivery employees who have direct contact with customers but are not in a position to start the sales process. In order to tap this sales potential, an intuitive portal was established to work as an interface between delivery employees, the *LeadGen* team and the sales manager. The delivery employees' role is to identify a qualified lead and register

the details. The *LeadGen* team is responsible for second-level qualification and for assigning a lead to sales, where it is further processed. The contributing employee gets an automated notification at every step and gets a reward if the lead is accepted. In 2013 alone employees contributed more than 670 leads through *LeadGen* accounting for a total of USD 147 million in sales opportunities and USD 60 million in ultimate sales [Besseyre des Horts, 2014].

Thanks to the creation of a climate for effective cooperation, line employees and management still come to work to earn money, but their mutual relations are not harmed by internal competition and a sense of taking part in a “death race” that could otherwise contribute to distrust and even aggression and fear [Szczerba, 2014]. Ideal working conditions – so-called high-performance work systems – can emerge under such circumstances [Amann, Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2013]. The core idea behind these systems is extraordinary employee commitment deriving its strength from the fulfillment of employee needs all across the Maslow pyramid. In this context, top performance can be achieved by giving the employees a chance to fulfill their transcendent needs [Maslow, 1970]. One of the factors that distinguishes companies advanced in relationship management from others is the application of corporate social responsibility (CSR). There is a tangible relationship between such an improved strategy, customer loyalty, employee motivation and investor attraction as companies that understand how to do that optimally are the most successful and survive the longest [O’Riordan, Zmuda, Heinemann, 2015]. However, transcendent needs can only emerge if all lower-stage needs are met. For most underperformers CSR would be a waste of money as the absence of work integrity leaves the impression of “washing green.” According to the CSR Rep Track, only 14% of the world’s best reputed large companies are believed to treat their employees well, which significantly lowers their overall CSR ranking (only 35% are assessed as trusted and supportive citizens) [Rogers, 2012]. Another study shows that spending on employee and community relations has a much bigger business impact than promoting diversity or ecology. This means that human resource management is the core performance driver in light of not only the traditional RBV realm of innovation but also broader stakeholder management [The Economist, 2015].

CSR is not the domain of the biggest enterprises. Polish company Astor, a leader on the market for industry automation solutions, has around 100 employees. The Krakow-based company is a member of the Business Center Club and holds numerous awards; for example, it took 7th place in the 2014 Great Place to Work contest. Its *Heart-Active* team manages 2% of the company’s net profit for charity and community support. One of the company’s biggest commitments is cooperation with the *Akademia Przyszłości* (Academy of the Future) organization, which provides workshops for children living in poor conditions and/or underperforming at school. Another program combines the company’s commitment to work-life balance and CSR. Astor grants a specific sum of money to people in need in exchange for photos showing employees

practicing sports. A collection of such photos can be found in Astors' intranet under the link *Anatomy of Good*. The list of the company's contributions is longer because every employee can suggest a new fundraising purpose. CSR efforts in this case are an integral part of the overall relationship-oriented strategy [Astor, 2016, p. 72]. And it all pays off. During the first wave of turbulence caused by the 2008 financial crisis, the company's management agreed with the employees that salaries would be temporarily reduced but nobody would be fired and that annual rewards would be paid out of the company's profit once its performance improved. As a result, in 2010 Astor reported a record 35% increase in sales in year-to-year terms [Questus, 2014].

Relationship management maturity should also be reflected in a company's structure. In the past, command and control corporate culture was traditionally accompanied by centralized structures that were believed to be more efficient in problem solving thanks to access to complete information by few decision-makers [Mulder, 1960]. This may still be true assuming that only a handful of people can be trusted to make decisions or that information is scarce [News Corp Australia, 2014]. However, the shift toward individualization in today's societies of risk [Tillmann, 2005] and digital technology is why flat structures are in most cases more effective than hierarchical systems [Kastelle, 2013]. Therefore, in relationship management-mature companies, the absence of tall structures is compensated for by a set of small problem-solving teams or temporary project structures, possibly marking the emergence of online collaborating virtual organizations [Stachowicz-Stanusch, Sworowska, 2009]. Finext is a consultancy firm with a portfolio of 500 large Dutch organizations. The key criterion for solving any issue at Finext is interacting and connecting. Its 150 employees are spread out over about 20 self-organizing teams with virtually no management structure. Yet they have stayed profitable for 20 years, relying on the principle that professionals are perfectly capable of running their own business and that talent can never be less important than the company structure [Hogendoorn, 2016]. Of course, such a democratic model is easier to apply in service businesses operating on the B2B market than in large manufacturing companies taking advantage of economies of scale in the B2C market, but the idea of replacing most rules and procedures with values and responsibility should be applied to the greatest possible extent. Most companies spend far too much time and money on enforcing rules aimed at preventing problems caused by a limited number of unreliable employees while devoting too little time on recruiting, onboarding and helping the right ones grow [McCord, 2015]. The managerial span of control in mature relationship-oriented organizations should be significantly wider than in transactional-oriented companies. Most decisions can be decentralized once detailed control is replaced by self-governance and transparent performance indicators.

Bringing change to a company also means adjusting its functional strategies and processes to relationship principles, especially in the case of customer-facing

units. Due to market conditions and individual company status, they may vary and evolve, but the examples below indicate the overall direction:

- sales: favorable offers upon customer loyalty and profitability status,
- marketing: preference for dialogue marketing programs supporting the who-what-when rule, budget for communicating with existing customers allocated in proportion to loyalty rate,
- customer service: adequate infrastructure, prioritizing and other preferences upon loyalty and profitability status,
- product development/service design: co-created or consulted with the company/brand affiliated community.

In 2000, the customer service levels of Wachovia, one of the largest financial services providers in the United States, were in a serious decline, which resulted in a customer churn rate of 20% every year. One of the reasons for this was an inadequate number of front-office personnel, which made both customers and employees dissatisfied. The traditional single-department functional approach left major communication channels with dwindling staff numbers, which brought cost savings but was inefficient from the general business perspective. As customer satisfaction and loyalty advanced to the bank's top priority, spending on staffing was dramatically increased and both metrics started to be discussed by the bank's management on a weekly basis. This and other customer-oriented decisions as well as investment in new technology made Wachovia become the perennial leader of the American Customer Satisfaction Index⁵ [Griffin 2009, pp. 213–214], [ACSI, 2015] and increased return for its stakeholders by 86% over three years [McSwain-Campbell, Jacobe, 2006].

Wachovia was successful thanks to a change management project but also thanks to its determination to embrace reorientation. And so the goals of change management vary from purely project-oriented to global strategy-oriented. The most common goal of relationship management projects is the automation of processes related to ICT investment. Although it leads to cost reductions by leveraging workflow effectiveness [McKean, 1999], it does not bring much progress in servicing the customer and other stakeholders. Nonetheless the impact of automation should be parameterized, at least in part, to support the business case with short-term success indicators such as reporting time reduction, data search time reduction or minimized document workflow.

Value process optimization measured by continuous improvement in short- and mid-term indicators like lead conversion, the share of cross-/up-selling offers, customer and employee satisfaction and retention, RFM (recency, frequency, monetary value of customers' purchases) or CLV (customer lifetime value – net present value of customers' purchases during the average loyalty period) [Wiśniewska, 2009], highlights elevated proficiency in the pursuit of the relationship approach. This concept goes in line with models such as the

⁵ Wachovia was taken over by Wells Fargo in 2009, but after the merger Wells Fargo continued its policy and remained at the top of the ACSI [ACSI, 2010; ACSI, 2015].

service chain concept [Heskett, Sasser, Schlesinger, 1997]. Another useful and at the same time simple relationship performance indicator is the net promoter score (NPS). Its inventor, F.F. Reichheld, found that there is a strong correlation between the relative number of promoters (customers willing to recommend the company to their family and friends), detractors (customers likely to discourage others from giving it a try) and the company's average growth rate [Reichheld, 2003]. Hence the NPS can be called a predictive loyalty indicator.

To make the picture complete, the analysis of process optimization indicators should be supplemented by reviews of relationship assets that can be parameterized upon the characteristics of communities or partnerships that the organization is able to create. Unlocking the potential hidden in relationship assets requires strong customer and employee engagement. In terms of customer engagement it can be measured by, e.g., the word-of-mouth advertisement/average referrals ratio, participation in knowledge sharing such as co-creation projects (B2C) [Kumar *et al.*, 2010], preferred or exclusive supplier status or joint business projects (B2B). Employee engagement is reflected in the number of innovation projects, knowledge transfer participation (i.e. internal training), and participation in CSR activities.

All these numbers indicate the current state or a trend in a company's performance, but the sole ability to calculate them will not bring any change at all. In this context, relationship maturity means that top and line management has to show the same interest in these metrics as they show in sales figures. At OCZ Storage Systems, a California-based Toshiba Group Company that manufactures solid state drives, a Voice of the Customer (VOC) council has been set up. This body includes representatives from each department. Its members meet twice a month to analyze customer feedback, put out fires and take decisions on whether to change products or processes. If necessary, an action plan is created and the representatives take the proposed changes back to their departments for execution. This approach has produced almost immediate results. When VOC was established, OCZ's NPS was 26, but it increased to 31⁶ three months later. Even more important than the continued improvement of NPS are the changes to company culture, operations and customer care, which are expected to be reflected in the company's bottom line [Netpromoter, 2015].

As the example of OCZ shows, continuous, incremental, gradual change plays a key role in all processes [Auksztol, Chomuszeko, 2012]. It is assumed that the company should focus on managing change rather than on any isolated change project [Osbert-Pociecha, 2010]. Hence the pursuit of the relationship approach can be related to not only implementation projects with their specific dynamics, starting and end point, but also strategic activities aimed at building a highly efficient business model based on a balance between customer-centric processes and organizational resilience [Deszczyński, 2011].

⁶ An NPS of 37 means that a company's promoters outnumbered the detractors by 37%.

Conclusions

A company's future is mainly endogenously determined on the basis of the RBV [Pyka, Brzóska, 2010]. In this context, the biggest threats for organizations are not external but result from entropy and inertia [Rumelt, 2013]. Just as management science strives to provide theoretical generalizations dealing with business practice [Sudoł, 2012], this article brings a framework that should be of help in researching the determinants of competitiveness based on the relationship approach. Owing to the diversity of theories and models in management science [Zimniewicz, 2007], the proposed relationship management maturity model refers to the work of many authors and diverse corporate case studies, but it aims to offer an original, coherent view on the causes/circumstances that either increase or limit the chance to improve a company's competitive advantage based on relationship assets. Along with the provided questionnaire (Annex 1), this view can also be applied in business practice as it not only identifies the essence of relationship assets, but it also shows how they should be activated – a key requirement to developing and maintaining a superior competitive position [Śliwiński, 2012]. The proposal model also marks a further step in developing an endogenous perspective in strategic management, which has faced a wave of criticism for being too formal and long-term oriented in today's turbulent environment [Obłój, 2007]. The model can help validate this argument as it applies strategic management in defining the configuration of company assets, procedures and structures with the main goal of preparing business organizations for change [Osbert-Pociecha, 2010] instead of planning far-reaching market scenarios.

This article does not exhaust the subject of either competitive advantage or relationship assets and relationship management. Even though the RBV has dominated the contemporary perception of the roots of competitive advantage, other approaches should also be considered. Future research could verify the links between relationship management maturity and the roots of competitive advantage by invoking the so-called "simple-rules" approach alternative to the RBV [Obłój, 2007]. This approach, which originates in Clayton Christensen's concept of disruptive technologies, links market success with the "time-accurate" use of occasional opportunities [Obłój, 2003], [Collins, Porras, 2008]. Possible regularities (if found) could help complete the set of additional conditions needed for relationship assets to leverage a company's performance, thus contributing to the discussion on the eclectic theory of competitiveness [Dzikowska, Gorynia, 2012], [Obłój, 2014].

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DOJRZAŁOŚĆ PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWA W ZAKRESIE ZARZĄDZANIA RELACJAMI

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie koncepcji dojrzałości w zarządzaniu relacjami przez przedsiębiorstwa. Podstawową metodą badawczą wykorzystaną przy pisaniu niniejszego tekstu była analiza polskiej i anglojęzycznej literatury. Ponadto zastosowano wiele studiów przypadków ilustrujących opisywane zjawiska przykładami pochodzącymi z praktyki biznesowej. Artykuł ma charakter koncepcyjny. Po dokonaniu syntezy zebranego materiału badawczego zaproponowano model dojrzałości w zarządzaniu relacjami. Model ten może posłużyć jako użyteczne narzędzie do oceny rzeczywistego stopnia relacyjnego zorientowania przedsiębiorstw i powiązania dojrzałości w tym zakresie z osiąganiem przez nie przewagi konkurencyjnej. Nadto oddzielenie przedsiębiorstw zorientowanych relacyjnie od grupy firm, które jedynie deklaratywnie stosują tę strategię pozostając jednak na etapie stosowania podejścia transakcyjnego, porządkuje aparat pojęciowy zasobowej teorii firm (Resource Based View – RBV). Wydaje się, że tworzone w procesie wielostronnego dialogu z partnerami zewnętrznymi i wewnętrznymi zasoby relacyjne spełniają bowiem kryteria zasobów kluczowych, a identyfikacja natury ich powstawania i wykorzystywania powinna w szczególności przyczynić się do rozwinięcia zagadnień wzrostu w ramach RBV. Przedstawione wnioski mogą zostać wykorzystane w dalszych analizach teoretycznych oraz badaniach empirycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: szkoła zasobowa (RBV), zarządzanie relacjami, zasoby relacyjne

Kody klasyfikacji JEL: L250, D230
