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STRENGTHENING AND SMOOTHENING INTER-FIRM TIES WITH THE AID OF COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT
Cooperation in modern business systems helps in increasing profits, locating diverse markets, enriching customers and assists in improving overall inter firm relationships. The paper investigates the extent of cooperation among 44 managers of small manufacturing firms, 74 wholesalers and 120 retailers in district Udhampur of J&K State. The data after purification & validation through factor analysis was subjected to multivariate tools. The results of hierarchal regression model, correlation matrix and ANOVA revealed dependence of relationship on the level of cooperation, positive association between cooperative goals & consistency in relationships and insignificant difference among channel members with regard to cooperation level. The study emphasized on bringing attitudinal changes among partners through education & collaborative activities which helps in promoting long term sustaining relationships.

KEYWORDS: Cooperation, Relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperation now-a-days is regarded as catalyst for smooth functioning of any organisation. Performance outcomes are based on the degree and level of cooperation & coordination among chain members. Cooperation fosters strong relationships among channel members by meeting the day-to-day promises. Relationship is an association/link with other parties such as wholesalers, retailers, customers, competitors, financial institutions etc. Cooperation in inter-firm relationships exists when firms exchange basic information and have some long term relations with a limited number of crucial suppliers or customers (Danny, et al., 2004). Cooperation has been conceptualized from the perspective of motive, from relations or situations or from behaviours (Chen, et al., 1998). As conceptualized by Morgan and Hunt (1994), cooperation is treated as the mutual perception of a situation in which the two parties are acting congruently. In addition, cooperation entails the active participation by one or both actors toward sustaining the relationship. Humphrey & Schmitz (2001) states that cooperation "reflects the firm's ability to collaborate and work together in a joint fashion toward their respective goals" where as Hewett & Bearden (2001) define cooperation as "complementary coordinated actions taken by the partners to achieve mutual outcomes". Cooperation is possible when the goals of each actor are positively related to each other, and are recognised as such (Chen et al., 1998). Cooperation among firms & parties improves effectiveness in the buyer-supplier relationship, leads to improved supplier logistics performance, assists in maintaining proper inventory levels and leads to overall growth (Heide & George, 1992). Therefore, the crucial role of cooperation cannot be ignored in the present era as its need of the hour and formulates the basis of sound and strong inter-firm relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the efforts of clarifying the nature of this relationship, authors have done a lot of studies which almost focused on inter-firm cooperation. Some authors investigated factors influencing this type of relationship (Rindlfleisch, 2000 and Edelenbos & Klijn, 2007). The others, in different objectives, have built up theories to explain that one (Evan, 1965; Anderson & Narus, 1990 and Morgan & Hunt, 1994). All of these researches have been studied in business and management field and they confirmed that these factors affect directly inter-firm relations, especially inter-firm cooperation.

Lakshminarshima (2007) after reviewing operations of Indian manufacturing industries found cooperation as a vital for sharing information on market, developing new products, reducing the supplier base and developing meaningful long term relationships (Wicks et al., 1999; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; and Croom et al., 2000). Clegg (2004) observed cooperation and trust in Asian countries promotes integrity, loyalty, competency, consistency and openness or transparency. The experience of various researchers & business practioners over time had suggested several strategies, beyond professional competence for building trust which includes encouraging friendship, facilitating communication by sharing information and keeping partners well informed about plans. Barber (1983) stresses that the expectations of an outcome depends on the other party's perceived diligence, competence and rationality in not engaging in irrational behaviour in any situation. Cooperation has also been viewed as the crucial feature of virtual collaboration where members believe in the character, ability, integrity, familiarity and morality of each other (Ishaya & Macaulay, 1999). Firms that are involved in co-operative ventures benefit from the sharing of costs and from reductions in risk that are associated with the

development of a new process or product. The shortening technology life cycle has raised pressure on firms to launch their products on time in the market. In the game of competing technologies, co-operation facilitates the formation of compatibility among technologies and channel members (Katz and Shapiro, 1985). It is worth noting that the role of co-operation should be regarded as a supplement rather than a substitute to a firm's internal R&D. Firms need to develop internal capabilities in order to trade in co-operation and reap the benefits of co-operation. The present study emphasis on the cooperative & coordinated relationships among the channel members in small scale manufacturing units located in district Udhampur of J&K State.

TESTABLE HYPOTHESES

Empirically it has been found that cooperation is fundamental in building buyers-suppliers relationships (Monczka et al., 1998; Beamon, 1999; Dyer & Chu, 2003; Zineldin & Jonsson, 2000; Brownell & Reynolds, 2002; and Johnston et al., 2004). Cooperation also generates adaptation & commitment, eliminates frictions in day-to-day operations, improves financial performance (Wicks et al., 1999), shares tacit knowledge for innovation (Walter et al., 2003) resulting in an increased rate of relational returns (Madhok, 1995). Cooperation has been conceptualized primarily from the perspective of motive, from relations or situations or from behaviors (Chen, et al., 1998) in inter-firm relationships (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Collaboration reduces purchasing cost by lowering contracting cost, frequent communication, improved coordination and a joint approach to operational solving (Scannell et al., 2000 and Cannon & Homburg, 2001). A cooperative relationship can improve collaboration between firms (Zineldin & Jonsson, 2004) since relationships rely more on trust rather than contacts. This suggests that buyers that cooperate their suppliers will exchange relevant, comprehensive, accurate & timely information and thereby contribute to joint problem solving & planning effort (Zand, 1972). Even, Johnston et al., (2004) found that suppliers trust in their buyers was strongly related to buyer-supplier collaborative and cooperative relationships. This leads to formulation of another hypothesis as

H_1: Effective inter-firm relationships are dependent on high level of cooperation.

H_2: Cooperative goals are positively associated with consistency in relationships.

H_3: Channel members differ significantly with regard to existence of cooperation level between them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary data for the study were collected from 44 functional manufacturing SSIs out of 49 units registered under District Industries Centre (DIC), Udhampur of J&K State. Five units were found to be non functional. The nature and number of downward members in SC included in the study were 74 (wholesalers) and 120 (retailers).The manufacturing units were sub-divided into ten lines of operation comprising cement (8), pesticide (3), steel (3), battery/lead/alloy (5), menthol (2), guns (2), conduit pipes (2), gates/grills/varnish (5), maize/atta/dal mills (3) and miscellaneous (11). Census method was used to elicit response from owners/managers of the SSIs and snowball/referral sampling for obtaining data from wholesalers and retailers. The number of wholesalers identified under cement (12), pesticide (2), steel (2), battery/lead/alloy (12), menthol (1), guns (3), conduit pipes (2), gates/grills/varnish (5), maize/atta/dal mills (14) and miscellaneous (20). The number of retailers identified was cement (22), pesticide (4), steel (4), battery/lead/alloy (20), menthol (2), conduit pipes (8), gates/grills/varnish (5), maize/atta/dal mills (33) and miscellaneous (27). Information was collected by administering self developed questionnaire prepared after consulting experts and review of literature which comprised of general information and 21 statements related to cooperstion. Statements in the questionnaire were in descriptive form, ranking, dichotomous, open ended and five -point Likert scale, where 1 stands for strongly disagree and 5 for strongly agree. The data collected was further analysed with the help of SPSS (Version 16.00) for data purification, checking validity and reliability. Multivariate tools such as Mean, Standard Deviation, hierarchal linear regression model, correlation matrix and ANOVA were used to test hypotheses and drawing meaningful inferences.

The raw data obtained from owners/managers of SSIs were purified and reduced through factor analysis on SPSS (Version 16.00) using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation (Kakati & Dhar, 2000), being the best rotation procedure which minimises the number of items with high loadings on one factor, thereby enhancing the interpretability of the factors (Malhotra, 2002). The process of R-Mode Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation in 5 iterations brought the construct to 16 statements of cooperation.

Reliability: Four factors were obtained after scale purification. As evident from the Table 1.1, the Cronbach's reliability coefficients for all 16 scale items underlying four factors ranges from 0.59 to 0.93. The alpha reliability coefficients for F_1 (0.93), F_2 (0.83), F_3 (0.59) and F_4 (0.86) is higher than the criteria of 0.77 obtained by Gordon and Narayanan (1984) indicating high consistency and reliability. However, the overall alpha reliability score for all factors is very much satisfactory at 0.80.

Validity: The four factors obtained alpha reliability higher & equal to 0.50 and satisfactory KMO value at 0.701, indicating significant construct validity of the construct (Hair et al., 1995).

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The suitability of raw data for factor analysis obtained from SSI managers is examined through KMO value (0.701), Bartlett's test 739.282 (p-value = 0.000), indicating sufficient common variance and correlation matrix (Dess et

al., 1997 & Field 2000). Thereafter, it was properly edited, purified and reduced through factor analysis on SPSS. The process of R-Mode Principal Components Analysis (PSA) with Varimax Rotation brought the construct to the level of 16 items out of 21 statements originally kept in the domain of cooperation. Therefore, factor loadings in the final factorial design are consistent with conservative criteria, thereby resulting into four-factor solution using Kaiser Criteria (i.e. eigen value ≥1) with 59.38% of the total variance explained. The communalities and % of variance explained by each factor are displayed in the Table 1.1. The resulting factors are as follows.

Factor 1 (Enhances effectiveness & efficiency): It contained five variables namely, "Cooperation improves work efficiency & effectiveness", "Cooperation in SC network gives improved customer service", "Cooperation enhances firm reputation", "Cooperation enhances trust among SC members" and "Internal & external cooperation is vital for SC performance" signifying mean values between (4.15 – 4.34), factor loadings (0.85 – 0.89) and communalities (0.82 - 0.84) which indicates that cooperation is practically vital for inter-firm relationships.

Factor 2 (Shared goals & values): The four variables included in this factor are: "Cooperation is a vital asset", "Problems are seen as joint responsibilities", "You are loyal to suppliers" and "You collaborate to reduce costs" which reflected significant mean scores, valuable factor loadings and supportive communalities. This factor highlighted cooperation as a valuable asset among firms and managers should give due recognition to it.

Factor 3 (Honesty & openness): This factor was engrossed with four items "Sometimes conflicts threatening your cooperation occurs", "You have give-n-take relationships with suppliers", "Suppliers interact regularly & openly" and "Cooperative relationships creates value for customers" scored moderate response (3.75 – 4.43) and manifested that mangers should cooperate in order to create value for customers.

Factor 4 (Timely availability): It considered three items viz-a-viz "Wholesalers/retailers cooperate to bring desired products", "Less time is involved between ordering & receipt of goods" and "Suppliers provide you timely material" and gauged "Wholesalers/retailers cooperate to bring desired products" to be the highest with factor loading as 0.923 and communality as 0.924. High level of cooperation exists between managers, wholesalers and retailers.

Table 1.2 shows output from multiple regression analysis to predict the dependent variable "Cooperative goals results in enhancing inter-firm relationships". The result of step-wise linear regression analysis enticed four independent factors as significant in predicting the dependent variable. These are: "Enhances effectiveness & efficiency", "Shared goals & values", "Timely availability" and "Honesty & openness". The correlation between predictor and outcome is positive with values of R as .904, .910, .914 and .917 which signifies high correlation between predictor and the outcome. In model 1, R is .904 which indicates 90% association between dependent and independent variables. R-Square for this model is .817 which means that 81% of variation in transportation management can be explained from the five independent variables. Adjusted R square (.809) indicates that if anytime another independent variable is added to model, the R-square will increase. Accordingly, the rest of the models portray association between dependent and independent variables. Further beta values reveal significant relationship of independent variables with dependent variable. Change in R square is also found to be significant with F-values significant at 5% confidence level. Errors in regression are independent as indicated by Durbin-Watson value (1.89) being close to 2. The aforesaid findings support the hypothesis **"Effective inter-firm relationships are dependent on high level of cooperation"**.

Further, in order to examine the nature and extent of relationship between dependent and independent variables simple correlation has been computed (Table 1.3). The single metric dependent variable is "Cooperative goals enhance relationships". Independent variables are "Enhances effectiveness & efficiency", "Shared goals & values", "Timely availability" and "Honesty & openness". The correlation coefficients indicate that all the factors are positively and significantly correlated with the dependent variable. The significant correlation coefficients emerged are Enhances effectiveness & efficiency (.640**), Shared goals & values (.607**), Timely availability (.694**) and Honesty & openness (.387(**). Thus the hypothesis **"Cooperative goals are positively associated with consistency in relationships"** is accepted.

The third and final hypothesis was analysed by taking into consideration the channel intermediaries (wholesalers/retailers/owners) in order to check out cooperation level among them. The ANOVA results portrayed that channel members donot differ with regard to existence of cooperation level as $p > .05$ i.e. 0.065 (Table 1.4). Therefore, the third hypothesis is rejected.

CONCLUSION

Cooperation is recognized as a vital tool in improving asset productivity & inventory turns, targeting customers & positioning products in diverse markets, enhancing intra & inter organisational networks, enriching technological capabilities to produce quality products thereby imparting effectiveness in inter-firm relationships. Timely delivery of products on the agreed terms & conditions and discharging duties & responsibilities as promised is needed to strengthen inter-firm ties. The study provides substantive support for previous findings in the inter-firm relations literature and fresh insights about the relationship that exists in small scale industries. An integrated strategic planning covering the dimensions like market positioning, cost economies, organisational purchasing and promotion is duly recognized by partners in strengthening channel relationships. The study also highlights the significance of cooperation &

collaboration in building successful and sustaining inter-firm relationships in industrial backward areas. From the practical perspective, the government functionaries must take initiatives to organize trade shows, seminars, workshops, conferences to strengthen inter-firm linkages by integrating fragmented supply chain intermediaries. Sensitizing managers through periodic training & education programmes the need & strategies to build cooperation & trust for profitable inter-firm relationships. The findings of the study is limited to small scale industries of district Udhampur of Jammu & Kashmir state, so results drawn cannot be generalized for medium or large scale industries functioning in other parts of country having dissimilar business environment.

Table 1.1: Results Showing Factor Loadings and Variance Explained After Scale Purification (Rotated ComponentMethod) for Cooperation

Factor-wise Dimensions	Mean	S.D	F.L	Eigen Value	Variance Explained %	Cumulative Variance %	Communality	α
F1 Enhances effectiveness & efficiency	**4.23**	**.531**		**5.341**	**20.670**	**20.670**		**.9361**
Improves efficiency & effectiveness	4.20	.509	.895				.844	
Improves customer service	4.34	.568	.889				.835	
Enhances firm reputation	4.15	.525	.861				.852	
Enhances trust	4.25	.533	.861				.843	
Vital for inter-firm performance	4.22	.522	.852				.829	
F2 Shared goals & values	**4.14**	**.456**		**5.003**	**14.464**	**35.134**		**.8385**
A vital asset	4.20	.461	.847				.785	
Problems are joint responsibilities	4.15	.428	.801				.850	
loyalty	4.13	.462	.795				.883	
Reduce costs	4.09	.473	.538				.602	
F3 Honesty & openness	**4.00**	**.691**		**2.347**	**12.260**	**47.394**		**.5991**
Sometimes conflicts occurs	3.80	.954	.841				.831	
Give-n-take relationships	3.79	.781	.664				.625	
Interact regularly & openly	4.00	.528	.662				.635	
Creates value for customers	4.43	.501	.651				.731	
F4 Timely availability	**4.16**	**.433**		**1.524**	**11.990**	**59.384**		**.8612**
Wholesalers/retailers cooperate	4.18	.445	.923				.924	
Less time between ordering & receipt of goods	4.18	.445	.868				.889	
Timely material	4.13	.408	.714				.755	

Footnotes: KMO Value =.0.701; Bartlett's Test of Sphercity = 739.282, df = 210, Sig. =.000; Extraction Method Principal Component Analysis; Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation; Rotation converged in 5 iterations; 'FL' stands for Factor Loadings, 'S.D' for Standard Deviation and 'α' for Alpha.

Table 1.2: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R^2	AdjustedR^2	Std. Error of Estimate	F value ANOVA	Sig. level	β	t	Sig. level	Durbin-Watson
1.	.904	.817	.809	.216	101.68	.000	.171	3.391	.001	1.891
2.	.910	.828	.819	.210	90.81	.000	.189	2.738	.007	
3.	.914	.835	.825	.207	81.21	.000	.096	2.209	.029	
4.	.917	.841	.830	.204	73.54	.000	.094	2.028	.045	

a) Predictor: (Constant), Enhances effectiveness & efficiency
b) Predictor: (Constant), Enhances effectiveness & efficiency, Shared goals & values
c) Predictor: (Constant), Enhances effectiveness & efficiency, Shared goals & values, Timely availability
d) Predictor: (Constant), Enhances effectiveness & efficiency, Shared goals & values, Timely availability, Honesty & openness
e) Dependent variable: Cooperative goals results in enhancing inter-firm relationships

Table 1.3: Correlation Matrix

Components		Cooperative goals enhances relationships	Enhances effectiveness & efficiency	Shared goals & values	Timely availability	Honesty & openness
Cooperative goals enhances relationships	Pearson Correlation	1				
Enhances effectiveness & efficiency	Pearson Correlation	.640(**)	1			
Shared goals & values	Pearson Correlation	.607(**)	.815(**)	1		
Timely availability	Pearson Correlation	.694(**)	.766(**)	.885(**)	1	
Honesty & openness	Pearson Correlation	.387(**)	.400(**)	.448(**)	.401(**)	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 1.4: One-way ANOVA

Description of Channel Members	Nature of Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Wholesalers	Between Groups	1.406	2	.703	2.773	.065
Retailers	Within Groups	59.585	235	.254		
Managers	Total	60.992	237			

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