

## COOPERATION WITH SUPPLIERS – BARRIERS AND BENEFITS FROM INDUSTRIAL MANUFACTURERS’ POINT OF VIEW

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**Abstract:** The subject of interest in this publication has been defined as cooperative relations between suppliers and producers. In the context of the above research was undertaken and its basic objective was outlined as finding the answer to the question: what is the impact of cooperation with regular suppliers on particular business areas? The research conducted allowed the authors to determine the nature and significance of the barriers to continuous cooperation identified by the manufacturers of the sector analyzed.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Conditions in which companies currently operate are continuously changing. The XXI century is the new management reality, which is forcing companies to choose new patterns of operation (Skrzypek, 2003) and to search for new sources of increasing the value of the company. It is the identification and effective management of these factors that determines the existence and development of the company in the market in the long term.

Opportunities for development and growth of companies do not solely depend on the ability to satisfy consumer needs. They are also consequence of the limitations of raw materials availability, capital, technology and human resources. In the sector of agricultural machinery manufacturers that the following paper is referring to, the essential sources of achieving competitive advantage are the cost, the technology implemented, the approach to innovation, solutions applied for production, as well as knowledgeable staff. Nevertheless, companies operating on the Polish market of agricultural machinery increasingly feel the need to develop complex systems of cooperation, which essentially depend on the size of their market share, the development strategy implemented, the perceived limitations and powers of the managerial staff. The strategy of cooperation is introduced gradually, as knowledge of its principles, instruments and relevance to the strategic objectives of the company are different among enterprises. The goal of cooperation between enterprises is that material goods from production companies playing the role of suppliers ended up in the sphere of production of the company playing the role of the recipient (Fertsch, 2003). It is worth mentioning that cooperation should be established in a flexible manner, noting that its level depends on the skills and abilities to define the relationship and communication between partners (Grzybowska, 2005).

In the highly competitive environment it is not enough to declare the company's orientation for cooperation, but it is essential to properly understand the essence of such orientation and its actual implementation in running business conditions.

What are the benefits of ongoing cooperation of manufacturing enterprise with its key suppliers? In theory, it is commonly known by everyone including the owner, manager or employee. Can this knowledge be trusted? Is it full and sufficient, yet tailored to the specific needs of the sector? Or is it only intuitive knowledge not supported with results of any research? These are important questions, especially as according to observations by A. Kaleta exploring knowledge, reaching information often deeply hidden, hard to find, is a condition of making rational decisions and striving for development (Kaleta, 2016). Searching for the best management methods, many entrepreneurs benefits from the experience of others. In most cases there is no individual research; it is safer, faster and, above all, cheaper to reach the finished pattern, which is part of this publication.

Starting from the above presented considerations, the authors determined that the object of interest in this publication is to be the cooperation within the supplier

– producer system. It was also found that when analysing the cooperation between enterprises the premises which tend contemporary manufacturers to create complex systems of cooperation should be considered (Nowak, 2012).

In the context of the above in this publication the research was undertaken, striving for:

- determining what is the impact of cooperation with regular suppliers on particular business areas?
- determining the essence and significance of the obstacles to continuous cooperation according to the manufacturers within the sector analyzed.

It seems that relatively little scientific recognition and complexity of the problems in the business practice justify treating these issues as a subject of research, which makes this publication important contribution to theory and practice, especially as the practice of business management offers variety of difficult situations, full of contradictions and dilemmas, as well as failures (Lichtarski, 2015). The issues presented do not cover the complexity of this subject. Publishing requirements necessitated the selection of the issues presented. The issues presented in the text should be treated as a context influencing the wider and better understanding of issues relating to long-term cooperation as an attribute of a lean organization, which is mainly applied for organization of production of standard products to the needs of the market. These products are developed in optimized processes of design and manufacture, with use of specialized equipment (Fertsch, 2005).

## **2. COOPERATION IN THEORY AND PRACTICE OF LEAN ORGANIZATIONS**

Innovative companies are looking for solutions possibilities using new ways of thinking and operating (Tomczak-Horyn & Knosala, 2016). New concepts of development management emerge – and they are more dynamic, flexible. Often they are not yet defined, operationalized, nevertheless, they set new directions for thinking about strategic management (Kaleta, 2016). Inevitable need to change existing models of management and operation of companies is their natural consequence (Walentynowicz, 2013).

More and more companies appreciate the approach to management in which the reference point is the so called "leanness". The lean approach to management flexibly and continuously meets the challenges of variability of demand, increased customer demands, and thus gives the opportunity for further development, which according to the authors, is a desirable feature of any organization. Lean management is achieving such efficiency that makes the company more flexible, lean, skilled and trained. Lean company is building its organization and managing its processes so as not to incur unnecessary costs associated with the operation under the huge organizational structure, oversized warehouses, unnecessary transporta-

tion or excessively complex administrative work, etc. The concept of lean company is focused on the elimination of all forms of waste, not only in the area of production, product design or the technology, but also concerning relations with environment. Nowadays, due to the rapid changes taking place in the environment, rising costs, the risk of failure, the implementation of complex investment projects without the cooperation with this dynamic environment is virtually impossible (Lewandowska, 2014). As a result of the cooperation companies over time build extensive economic bonds, technical and social, which in perspective make relationships with partners a complex management, marketing, social, logistic and cultural problem (Światowiec, 2006). The close cooperation between companies operating in the industrial markets, based on the principles of partnership, enables fast operation and diagnosis of the changing needs and expectations, customer preferences depending on the situation and organizational, technology and marketing development. The relationships between the customer and the supplier often rely on the joint introduction of new products, product improvement and the development of mutually compatible IT systems. In this case, the previously built partnership between the parties facilitates the introduction of new solutions and implementation of joint research (Szymczak & Urbaniak, 2006). In the context of the above the parties involved

in relationships must ensure relationships development and maintenance, interactivity, long-term nature, emotional context, and profitability of the transaction (Harker, 1999). Long-term cooperation must relate to the continuous search for new values with partners and share of the benefits within the system and partnership agreements covering the entire period of market activity of the system (Gordon, 2001). According to S. Hunt and R. Morgan cooperation is to create bonds of trust between the supplier and the recipient. The authors identify four areas that appear in the company, i.e. relationships with suppliers, relationships with intermediaries, relationships with customers, relationships within the company (Otto, 2004).

The partnership requires the company to design and adapt processes and communication tools, technology and people in such a way that they form the value expected from a supplier of a company. In the context of the above I. Gordon emphasizes the crucial role of partnership, not only with customers but also with external partners: suppliers, agents, shareholders and financial institutions. It becomes essential to create the chain of the partnership within the company between individual cells and employees (Gordon, 2001).

Practical experience of the authors of this study predispose them to conclude that manufacturers focus primarily on building relationships with customers and employees within the company. The relationships with the environment in a broader sense are neglected, omitted or just signalled. It is confirmed in the research of A. Klimek and H. Włodarkiewicz- Klimek (2003), noting that one of the most important issues of logistics in contemporary companies is customer service.

Relatively little attention is devoted to building a long-term cooperation with such elements of marketing environment, as suppliers, co-operators, shareholders, local authorities, local government and market competitors (Światowiec, 2008).

It should be emphasized that it is the processes associated with the supply that is an important aspect of corporate management, which determine the success or failure of the company on the market (Łuczak 2008). In contemporary industrial enterprises the way to increase competitiveness, both in terms of cost reduction and increase of the attractiveness of company's products is believed to be the area connected with the supply. It is well integrated purchases sources that have become an important aspect of creating competitive advantage among companies operating in the conditions of global supply chains. Therefore the increasing market demands contribute to the evolution and development of extensive cooperation within this area. This is very important, especially since the main task of corporate logistics is to efficiently supply all the materials necessary to carry out continuous and rhythmic operation (Nogalski & Niewiadomski, 2016).

Therefore, according to the authors, contemporary environment requires that enterprises applied systemic and comprehensive approach to cooperation. Achieving the goals established by the company therefore depends on harmonization of a number of instruments in the field of logistics and marketing. They are a set of methods to reduce costs at any moment of material flow through the company. Supply no longer focuses on products, instead considering the potential of suppliers. Supply takes proactive character, sets the networks and network management and the processes taking place within them (Bendkowski & Radziejowska, 2005).

To sum up, it should be emphasized that the main criterion for choosing a partner should be to minimize the total costs associated with the purchase of materials and maintenance of stock, and establishing a basis for the smooth running of production while ensuring an adequate level of quality of supplied materials. Proper approach to evaluation and selection of the best suppliers is essential here (Nogalski & Niewiadomski, 2013).

Considering sustainable market relations instead of individual transactions results in assuming that the relationships with suppliers, customers and other participants in the market environment are the assets. Such resources based on loyalty, are particularly noticeable in the practice of management and at the same time more and more frequently described in the literature phenomenon (Rudawska, 2008).

### **3. RESEARCH ON BARRIERS AND BENEFITS FROM COOPERATION WITH SUPPLIERS**

### 3.1. The goal, object and subject of research

The research referred to in this paper was conducted in July 2016. In the first stage of the research, which was of a preliminary character, the authors applied the method of literature studies (i.e.: Nowak, 2012) and expert consultations. The preliminary stage conditioned the generic research aimed to determine the impact of cooperation and determination of the nature and significance of barriers to continuous cooperation with key suppliers in the opinion of selected manufacturers of spare parts. The goal of the preliminary research was identification of and discussion on potential benefits for parts manufacturers resulting from continuous cooperation with suppliers and determination what barriers inhibit such cooperation. Due to the very broad spectrum of analyzed factors, their ordering and grouping was based primarily on – carried out in among the group of experts - consultations. When selecting the consultants, their knowledge and experience in the field of purchases have been taken into account. In each case the consultants appointed were economically active people actively involved in the cooperative processes of enterprises, in which they operate.

The primary objective of the research was developing the list of impact factors and the barriers and their discussion concerning the way of their definition (the methods of creative thinking were applied).

As a result, the final list of factors and barriers was developed, and moved to the new questionnaire; the questionnaire was developed to be used as a tool for the generic research. As a part of the research, twenty-five factors strongly influencing each business area were defined; their definitions and evaluation scale were developed as well. Since the introduction of more variables strongly complicates and prevents the formulation of conclusions, hence research has been limited only to that number of variables.

In the next stage of the research which was the generic stage, the list developed by the authors was delivered to fifty targeted managers who are representatives of companies analyzed. As mentioned before, the entities analyzed were the companies that produce parts and components for agricultural machines of domestic and foreign origin. The importance of each variable respondents rated with a scale from 1 to 5 points, where 1 – no impact, and 5 – very strong impact.

As in many statements by representatives of the management science the concern about its "practicality" is discussed, it is assumed that the primary value of the respondents' knowledge is basing on the so-called "best practices", i.e. examples of practical application of knowledge. In the context of the above mentioned, the research was directed to representatives of business practice. In the process of their selection, the following criteria were applied:

- Long-term cooperation of the respondent with the Spare Parts and Agricultural Machines Manufacturers „Fortschritt”, as a partner of research;
- Willingness to participate in the research;
- Interest in the results of the research covered by the presented subject matter;

- Direct acquaintance of researchers, allowing experts to verify whether the candidate:
- has adequate practical experience in the sector;
- has the communication skills to facilitate the transfer of knowledge;
- transfers knowledge in a fair and conscientious way;
- is ethical in his/her behaviour;
- is independent in his/her judgments and opinions issued;
- has extensive, properly structured knowledge in the field.

### **3.2. Assessment of influence of cooperation with regular suppliers – analysis of benefits from producer’s perspective**

The integration of the supply chain has now become the essence of modern management. It is worth noting that the cooperation in the supply chain today concerns not only logistics, but also the marketing, production, quality management, research and development, etc. The concept of supply chain management was developed as an alternative to the traditional way of understanding the relationship between suppliers and buyers in terms of constant antagonism and desire to use the bargaining power (Witkowski, 2010). In the context of the above, the primary goal of a questionnaire was to answer the question what is the impact of cooperation with regular suppliers on particular business area? The research results are shown in Table 1.

Due to the high market saturation and rapidly changing environment, companies need to know what to produce, how to produce and how and to whom to sell their product. Therefore, it becomes essential to take - on the basis of the available information from the partners - quick and effective decisions. This is confirmed by the results of studies in which 98% of companies indicated that cooperation with regular suppliers to the greatest extent determines the new implementations implying an increase in assortment of manufactured parts (average 4.50 out of 5 points). This results in an increase in capacity utilization (average 4,48 out of 5 points) and the increase in the number of produced parts (average 4.46 out of 5 points). These results are the confirmation of the fact that: "The preferential nature of relationships are given by the partners who start them, and the strategies that they implement in their operations" (Strategor, 1999, p. 256). The results of the research confirm that "income from the relationship" can take the character of: access to buyers, to complementary resources and capabilities (production capacity) of partners, the opportunity to learn and accumulation of technical and organizational knowledge and achieving economies of scale and scope of operations (Nowak, 2012).

The recent turmoil in the global economy caused that both practitioners and academics started to look for concepts and methods of management, striving for elimination of losses before they will appear in the production process. Reducing the costs of the enterprise, as a result of cooperation with suppliers, it is therefore an important stimulus implying implementation of Lean culture (average 4.42 out of 5 points).





According to the companies surveyed cooperation with suppliers has a large (54%) or very strong (44%) impact on flexibility of the company. Flexibility, which determines acquiring relevant competencies is treated as an antidote to progressive globalization and turbulence of the environment. Today, more and more companies are beginning to realize that it is high quality non-material resources that are difficult to parameterize which are much more valuable source of competitive advantage than many assets on the balance sheet (Niewiadomski, 2011). In the context of the above mentioned it is worth noting that according to the surveyed companies cooperation with suppliers has at least a large (58%) or very strong (38%) impact on the development of competences (including knowledge) of people employed there. Choosing continuous cooperation with regular suppliers significantly implies the areas that respondents hierarchized as follows:

- Improving manufacturing processes (average 4.32 out of 5 points);
- Improving the quality of our products (average 4.14 out of 5 points);
- Optimising the use of means of production (average 4.10 out of 5 points);
- Improving the image of the company (average 4.08 out of 5 points);
- Improving return on sales (average 4.02 out of 5 points);
- Increasing the bargaining power (average 4.00 out of 5 points);
- Improving competitive position (average 4.00 out of 5 points).

The research conducted by the authors gave direction to strive for organizing the areas substantially implied by cooperation between producers and suppliers - external co-operators, which determines producers' success. The success of the company is the state intended, obtained within a certain time. To define the success of the company it is necessary to determine the values that are its determinant. For each company success can be seen in a different way, hence the hierarchy of values and experience of the individual in charge of the company, plays an important role which was used in the course of the presented research. It seems that the complexity of the problems and mere so far, scientific diagnosis justifies the selection of these issues as an object of scientific inquiry.

### **3.3. Barriers of development of cooperation from producers' perspective – idea and importance**

In the economic literature there are many limitations of functioning and development of enterprises described. These barriers can be divided into internal and external. The internal barriers are the factors related to the company, e.g. knowledge, attitudes and skills of entrepreneurs. While the external constraints are the elements relating to the enterprise's environment, which affect, among other things the direction of the implemented strategy. The degree of the impact of individual factors largely depends on the sector in which it is established. Proper identification of the existing barriers to enterprise development can help people who want to avoid at least some of the negative effects of the measures taken.

In the context of the above mentioned the following steps to be taken – among selected group of fifty companies – was the research striving for determination what are the barriers to the development of long-term cooperation between the manufacturer operating in the sector of agricultural mechanization and its suppliers? The research results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Barriers of long term cooperation development – idea and importance; Own work based on research

No.	Barriers to cooperation	Level of importance (% of indications)					Average
		1	2	3	4	5	
<b>B-1</b>	Location (distance between partners)	2.0	2.0	10.0	44.0	42.0	4.22
<b>B-2</b>	Quality, timeliness in the log-run perspective concerns	2.0	2.0	14.0	38.0	44.0	4.22
<b>B-3</b>	Fear of problems with width of assortment and its availability	2.0	4.0	12.0	38.0	44.0	4.18
<b>B-4</b>	Fear of innovativeness, its lack, market based fitness	2.0	4.0	12.0	52.0	30.0	4.04
<b>B-5</b>	To burdensome legal and formal aspects	-	2.0	30.0	38.0	30.0	3.96
<b>B-6</b>	To low entering barriers	2.0	4.0	18.0	48.0	28.0	3.96
<b>B-7</b>	Lack of trust	2.0	6.0	28.0	38.0	26.0	3.80
<b>B-8</b>	Fear of suppliers taking the employees	4.0	4.0	32.0	38.0	22.0	3.70
<b>B-9</b>	Lack of full information from suppliers	2.0	6.0	30.0	44.0	18.0	3.70
<b>B-10</b>	Fear of changing cooperation conditions	4.0	4.0	30.0	44.0	18.0	3.68
<b>B-11</b>	Fear of not keeping agreement conditions	2.0	4.0	34.0	46.0	14.0	3.66
<b>B-12</b>	Financial condition of suppliers	2.0	2.0	46.0	36.0	14.0	3.58
<b>B-13</b>	Low level of modern solutions at suppliers	4.0	2.0	44.0	34.0	16.0	3.56
<b>B-14</b>	To low stock levels at suppliers	2.0	2.0	52.0	28.0	16.0	3.54
<b>B-15</b>	Fear of unjustified price increase	4.0	4.0	42.0	34.0	16.0	3.54
<b>B-16</b>	Lack of recommendations	2.0	2.0	50.0	34.0	12.0	3.52
<b>B-17</b>	Fear of information leaks	2.0	8.0	54.0	22.0	14.0	3.38
<b>B-18</b>	Lack of compatibility, unmatched business models	6.0	22.0	34.0	22.0	16.0	3.20
<b>B-19</b>	Fear of dependency on suppliers	6.0	16.0	48.0	14.0	16.0	3.18
<b>B-20</b>	Fear of diversification and losing bargaining powers	4.0	22.0	42.0	20.0	12.0	3.14
<b>B-21</b>	Fear of losing customers (taken by suppliers directly)	8.0	24.0	42.0	14.0	12.0	2.98
<b>B-22</b>	Losing core competencies	6.0	36.0	30.0	22.0	6.0	2.86
<b>B-23</b>	Suppliers lack of certificates	6.0	42.0	36.0	10.0	6.0	2.68
<b>B-24</b>	Ownership structure	20.0	42.0	18.0	14.0	6.0	2.44
<b>B-25</b>	To high expectations of suppliers (logistics minimum)	18.0	28.0	50.0	2.0	2.0	2.42
<b>B-26</b>	Fear of acquisition of the company by partners	24.0	58.0	16.0	2.0	-	1.96

In the course of research authors found that an inhibiting factor to cooperation between the supplier and the manufacturer is unfavorable location (distance between entities) and concern about the quality, timeliness in the long term (average 4.22 out of 5 points). According to the authors considering location as a barrier, especially in times of global economy implied the development of modern transport technologies was quite surprising. Distance should not be a problem nowadays. Perhaps such classification of this factor is dictated by the fact that excessive distance can affect the lead-time of some processes, e.g. supply, which in turn diminishes the flexibility of the company. Noteworthy is the fact that too burdensome formal and legal requirements are a barrier inhibiting the establishment of lasting cooperation (average 3.96 out of 5 points). Manufacturers avoid excessive administration wanting to focus on the core operations of the company, which is fully justified. The fear of the acquisition of the company is barrier to cooperation to a small number of manufacturers (1.96 out of 5 points).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The diversity and continuous change characterizing contemporary society manifests itself in a diversified transfer of information and multiplicity of their sources. This presents new challenges to enterprises which in fact makes them modify their relationship with the environment (Niewiadomski, 2016). An organization seeking to achieve and maintain competitive advantage – by Sz. Cyfert – should precisely define its business domain, which will enable realization of transactions with co-operators, will ensure the legitimacy of actions taken, ensure access to needed resources and will allow capturing value in the value chain within the industry, especially as according to Nogalski B. (2010) contemporary business is subject to significant changes, consisting in the functioning in the wider institutional perspective, growing discontinuity of development challenges, increasing complexity of the social system.

The success is reached by enterprises that flexibly adapt to the environment, make decisions, often difficult and unpopular, that convert the threat into an opportunity to increase the value of their businesses. In the context of the above, it should be emphasized that the developing businesses are those which create the reality, create expectations and needs of the environment, meet them and think innovatively in the entire chain of value creation (Krawiec, 2014).

Given the above, the authors of this study postulate that it is the quality of relations with co-operators that contributes to the increase in the value of the company, improves its competitive position and becomes a key challenge for today's companies operating especially in the market of industrial goods.

The goal of the discussion presented was therefore determining the significance of the cooperation with regular suppliers for each business area, and to determine

the nature and significance of barriers to cooperation by producers operating in the sector, manufacturers of parts for agricultural machinery. In the context of the above, in the course of ongoing research, the authors found that cooperation with regular suppliers to the greatest extent determines the new implementations implying an increase in the range of assortment of produced parts which then results in an increase in capacity utilization and the increase in the number of parts produced. The factor limiting the opportunity of long-term cooperation between the supplier and the manufacturer is unfavourable location (distance between entities) and concern about the quality, timeliness in the long run.

Taking up the research and citing the work by Sudoł S. (2012), the authors accepted that the management is considered as a science, the effect of which is socially useful knowledge in the form of fixed principles of economic and social phenomenas and theories that explain reality, provide solutions to be used and help to rationalize the reality. Topicality of the issue of establishing a long term relationship stems from the growing interest in this issue many companies. This concept is often characterized in the general and theoretical sphere, but there are still many areas that require more specific recommendations. The research presented strives for filling the gap in knowledge, through partially but by combining the two dimensions – practical and theoretical.

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