

# Drivers and Benefits of Supplier Satisfaction in a Buyer-Supplier Relationship: A Multiple Case Study at Company X and Three of its Suppliers

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## ABSTRACT

*Developments in the competitive business environment draw growing attention to the concept of supplier satisfaction as well in theory as in practice. Buying firms are increasingly competing for access to the best suppliers and their resources. Supplier satisfaction represents a mean for gaining and keeping this access. This research builds on previous studies about the concept of supplier satisfaction by conducting a multiple case study at a company operating in the organic food industry. The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the concept and to explore possible antecedents of supplier satisfaction. The findings provide support for the impact of operative excellence, profitability, reliability and relational behaviour, which are previously identified antecedents to satisfaction of suppliers. Information sharing was found to be influencing supplier satisfaction, as well, and can be added as a new antecedent connected to relational behaviour. In addition to that, the influence of three new concepts was assessed: The kraljic matrix, customer portfolio analysis, and buyer status. The findings show that the kraljic matrix has a direct impact on supplier satisfaction, while customer portfolio analysis only has an indirect impact. Furthermore, no evidence for a relationship between buyer status and supplier satisfaction could be found in this case study.*

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## Keywords

Supplier satisfaction, preferred customer status, customer attractiveness, buyer-supplier relationship, buyer status, customer portfolio analysis, kraljic matrix, benefits

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## 1. SUPPLIER SATISFACTION IS IMPORTANT FOR ACHIEVING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

The strategic role of purchasing as a value adding activity has been increasingly recognised in the recent years. Purchasing is not viewed as a simple buying function anymore, instead companies are acknowledging the vital role procurement is capable of playing in the development of competitive advantage of the firm (Gangurde & Chavan, 2016, p. 1751; Mol, 2003, p. 7; Tassabehji & Moorhouse, 2008, pp. 62-66). Two emerging trends that underpin the importance of purchasing can be observed: (1.) The increasing allocation of responsibilities to suppliers and (2.) the decreasing amount of available suppliers in a lot of business-to-business markets (Schiele, Calvi, & Gibbert, 2012, p. 1178). Companies are becoming more and more dependent on suppliers due to increased outsourcing and the shift to open innovation (Roberts, 2001, pp. 31-32; Schiele, 2012, pp. 46-47; Schiele, Veldman, & Hüttinger, 2011, p. 2). However, at the same time oligopolistic market structures evolve, in which the remaining suppliers are able to select their customers (Schiele, Ellis, Eßig, Henke, & Kull, 2015, pp. 132-133). Caused by these developments, buying firms are progressively competing for the best suppliers and their resources (Ellis, Henke, & Kull, 2012, p. 1266; Routroy & Routroy, 2016, pp. 1170-1172; Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11). Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1178) identified this phenomenon as “a counter-intuitive inversion of the classical marketing approach.”

In this situation of supplier scarcity and increasing dependency, purely price-driven purchasing strategies may not be very successful anymore. Strategic supply management becomes necessary in order to guarantee access to key suppliers (Hüttinger, Schiele, & Veldman, 2012). This access is important because “suppliers can provide resources such as ideas, capabilities, and materials that build competitive advantages that might not be achieved otherwise” (Pulles, Schiele, Veldman, & Hüttinger, 2016, p. 129). Already Dyer and Singh (1998, p. 661) recognised that a company can achieve a competitive advantage by combining resources in unique ways. However, competing firms may be interested in the same resources from the same network of suppliers. Since supplier’s resources are limited, some buying firms may receive better resources from suppliers than others (Pulles, Schiele, et al., 2016, p. 129; Pulles, Veldman, & Schiele, 2016, pp. 1458-1459; Tóth, Thiesbrummel, Henneberg, & Naudé, 2015, p. 723). The companies that get preferential access to the supplier’s resources are “preferred customers” of a supplier (Schiele, 2012, p. 43). Consequently, a preferred customer status enables buying firms to gain an advantage over the competition (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1194; Pulles, Schiele, et al., 2016, pp. 137-138).

Vos, Schiele, and Hüttinger (2016, p. 4621) recently provided empirical evidence that supplier satisfaction has a positive impact on achieving a preferred customer status and thus preferential treatment by suppliers. Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1179) actually view supplier satisfaction as a necessary condition for achieving a preferred customer status. But even though supplier satisfaction can be identified as a prerequisite for a preferred customer status and competitive advantage, it is a quite unexplored topic. (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1198; Schiele et al., 2015, p. 133; Vos et al., 2016, p. 4613). Since supplier satisfaction is important for achieving competitive advantage, it is important to know how supplier satisfaction can be achieved. Therefore, the research question of this thesis is:

*RQ1: What are the influencing factors of supplier satisfaction in business-to-business relationships?*

Supplier satisfaction is a feature of buyer-supplier relationships (Essig & Amann, 2009, p. 104). According to Christiansen and Maltz (2002, p. 178), the type of buyer-supplier relationship mostly depends on the decision of the buyer. How a buying firm manages these relationships is affected to a large extent by purchasing and supply management strategies (Gelderman & Van Weele, 2003, p. 207). Already Dyer, Cho, and Cgu (1998, p. 73) noted that different suppliers require different strategies for procurement. They suggested to segment suppliers strategically in order to optimise purchasing effectiveness and to ensure efficient allocation of buyer’s resources. Depending on the segment buyers are managed differently. Suppliers that are considered as most (strategically) important, typically receive the most resources (Dyer et al., 1998, p. 73). To sum up, different suppliers are treated differently, based on the segment they are allocated to. It can be expected that a supplier, to whom a buyer dedicates many resources, is more satisfied with the exchange relationship, than a supplier that receives only a limited number of resources. Therefore, the assumption derives that the segmentation of suppliers is influencing supplier satisfaction. The Kraljic matrix was one of the first portfolio models for supplier segmentation and is still a widely adopted tool today (Gelderman & Mac Donald, 2008, p. 78; Gelderman & Van Weele, 2003, p. 207; Hesping & Schiele, 2016, p. 101). For that reason the Kraljic matrix will be the approach used in this study, leading to the following sub-question:

*SQ1: To what extent does the position of the supplier in the Kraljic matrix influence the buyer-supplier relationship in terms of supplier satisfaction?*

Similarly to supplier segmentation, customer portfolio analysis is part of the relationship management process and determines how the relationship with the customer is developed and maintained from the supplier’s point of view. The main purpose of customer portfolio analysis is to distinguish between customers of different value to the focal firm in order to ensure effective allocation of resources (Terho & Halinen, 2007, p. 721). It can be hypothesised that customer portfolio analysis is influencing supplier satisfaction with the exchange relationship, because suppliers invest more in relationship development with high-value customers (Thakur & Workman, 2016, pp. 4095-4097), resulting in an improvement of relationship quality. Consequently, the second sub-question is:

*SQ2: What is the impact of customer portfolio analysis on supplier satisfaction?*

One dimension that may influence customer portfolio analysis, as well as supplier’s expectations about benefits of a buyer-supplier relationship is the buyer status. The functions of a status can be classified as a signal (of buyer quality), as an intangible asset for the organisation holding it, or as a mobile resource. A high buyer status gives benefits to suppliers and often provides the basis for cooperative relationships (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014, pp. 301-304). Since the supplier benefits from being affiliated with a high-status buyer, it can be assumed that suppliers put greater effort in the exchange relationship, which enhances the quality of the relationship and therefore increases supplier satisfaction. This leads to the following sub-question:

*SQ3: How does buyer status influence supplier satisfaction?*

To answer these research questions the subsequent sections will be structured in the following way: At first existing literature on supplier satisfaction and associated concepts are summarised. Additionally, the three new concepts outlined in the sub-questions will be described in relation to supplier satisfaction. The next chapter will discuss the methodology of data collection and research, which is used to conduct the study. Thereafter, the buying company Company X will be introduced, followed by the

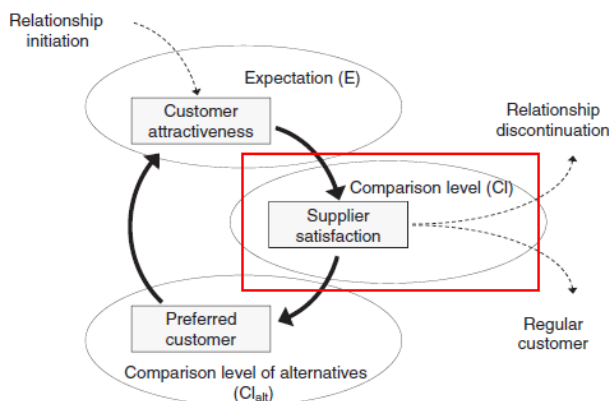
interview results and descriptions of the three cases under study. In chapter 5, the findings will be discussed and compared to previous studies. Furthermore, the purchaser's and supplier's point of view will be compared with each other and the research questions will be answered. The last chapter deals with the paper's limitations, practical implications, theoretical contributions and suggestions for future research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW: SUPPLIER SATISFACTION AS A PART OF THE PREFERRED CUSTOMER CYCLE

### 2.1 The Three Concepts in the Cycle of Preferred Customership: Customer Attractiveness, Supplier Satisfaction and Preferred Customer Status

#### 2.1.1 Social Exchange Theory Creates Logical Linkages between Customer Attractiveness, Supplier Satisfaction and Preferred Customer Status

The social exchange theory (SET) often has been used to explain buyer-supplier relationships and provides the basis for the preferred customer cycle (Nollet, Rebolledo, & Popel, 2012, p. 1187). The theory owes its popularity in this field to its explanations of relationship integration, termination and continuation issues (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1179). It deals with "the behaviours and perceptions that motivate and guide equitable reciprocity between the involved parties under uncertain conditions" (Ellis et al., 2012, p. 1260).



**Figure 1: The cycle of preferred customership, based on: Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1180)**

The first step of the preferred customer cycle is to start an exchange relationship with a supplier through initial attraction, even before any exchange has been performed (Ellis et al., 2012, p. 1260; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1188). Customer attractiveness is a highly relational concept (Makkonen, Vuori, & Puranen, 2016, p. 157). According to Schiele et al. (2012, p. 1180), whether a supplier views a buying firm as attractive or not is determined by the supplier's expectations towards the buyer (E). This perceived attractiveness influences the initiation and intensification of an exchange relationship between the two actors and therefore provides the basis for supplier satisfaction to develop. (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1194; Mortensen & Arlbjørn, 2012, p. 159). When the buying firm succeeds in attracting the supplier and an exchange relationship is initiated, the second step is to generate supplier satisfaction. Satisfaction results from the comparison of the actual outcomes with previously formed expectations (CI) (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180). The satisfaction of the supplier with the interaction and the value provided will determine the

continuation or discontinuation of the relationship (Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1188). In the third step the supplier will make a choice whether to end or to continue the relationship with the buyer as a regular customer or as a preferred customer. In order to make this decision, the supplier compares the customer to available alternatives ( $CI_{alt}$ ).

To sum up, the cycle of preferred customership shows that attractiveness and satisfaction represent motivational factors affecting the decisions about initiation, continuation, and intensification of an exchange relationship. Thus, by building on SET the concepts of attractiveness, supplier satisfaction and PCS can be linked logically. (Pulles, Schiele, et al., 2016, p. 3; Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180). While customer attractiveness is an "ex-ante expectation", supplier satisfaction is an "ex-post experience" (Hald, 2012, p. 1228). Since this study deals with ongoing business relationships, attractiveness will not be discussed in further detail. Instead, the focus of the following section will be on supplier satisfaction and its consequences.

#### 2.1.2 Supplier Satisfaction Depends on the Degree to Which Expectations Are Met or Exceeded

Satisfaction is hard to develop without initial attraction since attractiveness allows the development of a relationship, which then will be evaluated by the supplier resulting in satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Pulles, Schiele, et al., 2016, p. 4). The satisfaction of the supplier with the exchange relationship, depending on the degree to which expectations are met or exceeded, determines how the buyer is treated by the supplier. SET suggests that a supplier who has satisfactory as well as unsatisfactory relationships will make more investments in a relationship causing satisfaction. This behaviour can be explained by the norm of reciprocity, which implies that in the case of satisfaction the supplier feels indebted to make relational investments in order to reciprocate relational benefits (Nyaga, Whipple, & Lynch, 2010, p. 102; Pulles, Schiele, et al., 2016, pp. 131-132). Consequently, a satisfied supplier will reward the buying firm with a preferred customer status and the associated benefits (Hüttinger et al., 2012, pp. 1194-1195; Pulles, Schiele, et al., 2016, p. 137; Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1182), while dissatisfaction may result in the termination of the relationship (in case there are better available alternatives) (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181).

The level of satisfaction can vary during a relationship, resulting in possible down- or upgrading of customers. Therefore, supplier satisfaction is not a fixed state once achieved, instead, buyers continuously have to put effort in maintaining and improving supplier satisfaction. Consequently, it is important to understand how supplier satisfaction can be achieved. Several previous studies that build on one another dealt with this issue by applying different methods. While Hüttinger et al. (2012, pp. 1195-1204) reviewed literature concerning the antecedents of supplier satisfaction, Hüttinger, Schiele, and Schröer (2014, p. 711) assessed the drivers of supplier satisfaction quantitatively and qualitatively through a focus group discussion and a subsequent testing of findings in a supplier survey. According to their results, suppliers value social factors (including reliability and relational behaviour) and economic factors (growth opportunity) the most (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 712). Schiele et al. (2015, pp. 134-137) applied Social Capital Theory and Resource Dependency Theory to derive hypotheses about factors influencing supplier satisfaction. The most recent study was conducted by Vos et al. (2016, p. 4621), who integrated the earlier model of Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 711) in a new model with a focus on indirect procurement to test and extend their results in a new context. With the revised model, Vos et al. (2016) took the interdependencies between the antecedents of supplier

satisfaction into account by ordering them in a causal hierarchy with first- and second-tier antecedents. At the first tier, there are the factors having a direct impact on supplier satisfaction, namely profitability, growth opportunity, and operative excellence – representing economic factors – and relational behaviour – a social factor. The second tier antecedents are the following: Customer's reliability, support of suppliers, and supplier involvement positively influencing relational behaviour, innovation potential with a positive impact on growth potential, and contact accessibility positively influencing perceived operative performance (Vos et al., 2016, p. 4621). All of these factors are found to be significantly influencing supplier satisfaction in direct as well as indirect procurement. The findings support the results of earlier studies and add profitability as a new antecedent.

The profitability of a relationship can be assessed by considering all costs and revenues associated with the relationship (Holm, Eriksson, & Johanson, 1996, p. 1043). The concept of growth opportunity can be defined as the possibility of the buyer and supplier to grow together. The supplier's perception that the operations of the buying firm are handled efficiently is described by the concept of operative excellence (Hüttinger et al., 2014, pp. 702-703). Relational behaviour in buyer-supplier relationships has a significant influence on the quality of the relationship (Ivens, 2005, p. 32; Leuthesser, 1997, p. 252) and "is characterised by both the content of communication between the parties and the mode of the interactions themselves" (Leuthesser, 1997, p. 245). With regard to supplier satisfaction relational behaviour "refers to the buying firm's behaviour towards the supplier with regard to the relational focus of exchange" (Hüttinger et al., 2014, p. 701). Specific definitions of all first- and second-tier antecedents can be found in appendix 1, table 1.

### *2.1.3 A preferred customer status is a consequence of supplier satisfaction, which is by definition connected to benefits*

Supplier satisfaction has not only important antecedents but also significant consequences. As a result of high supplier satisfaction, buying firms can be upgraded to a preferred customer (Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1181). The concept of preferred customer has recently received increased attention (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1194). Several recent articles discussed this phenomenon (Bemelmans, Voordijk, Vos, & Dewulf, 2015, pp. 178-185; Pulles, Schiele, et al., 2016, pp. 129-131; Routroy & Routroy, 2016, pp. 1171-1172; Schiele & Vos, 2015, pp. 139-141). The term 'preferred customer' is also used interchangeably with 'best customer' (Moody, 1992, p. 52), 'interesting customer' (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, pp. 178-179) or 'customer of choice' (Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 127). However, all of these terms refer to the same concept. Already Williamson (1991, p. 83) noted the importance of being a preferred customer because they are going to be served at first, while "less preferred customers are forced to wait in a queue" (Williamson, 1991, p. 81). In accordance with the findings of Williamson, Steinle and Schiele (2008, p. 11) defined a buying firm as a preferred customer of a supplier when the supplier offers preferential resource allocation. Therefore, a preferred customer status is by definition connected to benefits, which can give an advantage over competitors.

The benefits resulting from such a status can be diverse. Privileges of financial, operational, strategic, innovative or supportive nature exist. Preferential resource allocation is probably the most important benefit, since firms that are able to combine resources in unique ways may realise a strategic advantage over competitors that are not able or unwilling to do so (Dyer & Singh, 1998, p. 661). Further, preferred customers

receive advantages concerning the delivery (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 189; Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1187) and quality of goods (Nollet et al., 2012, p. 1187). According to Schiele (2012, p. 44), privileged access to supplier innovation and new technology (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 189; Ellis et al., 2012, p. 1265) belongs to the privileges, as well. Moreover, a preferred status may lead to benevolent pricing behaviour (Schiele et al., 2011, pp. 13-16) and (joint) cost reduction benefits (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 189; Hald, Córdón, & Vollmann, 2009, p. 963; Ulaga, 2003, p. 689). Furthermore, suppliers can offer supportive benefits such as the provision of most skilled employees for joint product development (Hüttinger et al., 2012, p. 1194; Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 11). On top of that, Nollet et al. (2012, p. 1187) found that suppliers show increased responsiveness towards preferred customers and provide them with appropriate information in a timely manner.

## **2.2 The Kraljic Matrix, Customer Portfolio Analysis, and Buyer Status in Relation to Supplier Satisfaction.**

### *2.2.1 The kraljic matrix: An effective tool for managing buyer-supplier relationships from the buyer's point of view*

Through strategic management of the supply driven market, a competitive advantage can be achieved (Hesping & Schiele, 2016, p. 101). "Obviously, not all products and not all buyer-supplier relationships are to be managed in the same way." (Gelderman & Van Weele, 2003, p. 207) Purchasing portfolio models give guidance on how to manage a balanced combination of supplier relationships and products by providing differentiated strategies (Gangurde & Chavan, 2016; Gelderman & Mac Donald, 2008, pp. 1752-1753; Roseira, Brito, & Henneberg, 2010, p. 926). These models gained attention by researchers as well as practitioners due to their simplicity and effectiveness (Santos, Osiro, & Lima, 2017, p. 53). Peter Kraljic (1983) introduced the first comprehensive portfolio model, which is a widely adopted approach for purchasing and supply management today (Gelderman & Mac Donald, 2008, p. 78; Gelderman & Van Weele, 2003, p. 207; Hesping & Schiele, 2016, p. 101). The matrix and its strategic recommendations were first developed around 1973 for BASF, a German chemical company, based on the experiences of four large industrial companies (Gelderman & Mac Donald, 2008, p. 78). The overall goal of the approach is to minimise supply risk and to exploit buying power (Kraljic, 1983, p. 112).

In the kraljic matrix, products are categorised into four distinct purchase groups: bottleneck, leverage, non-critical and strategic items, based on two dimensions: supply risk and profit impact (low vs. high). Another version of the matrix exists, which replaces profit impact with strategic importance (Hesping & Schiele, 2016, p. 101), nonetheless, the focus will be on the first one. For each of the four categories, a distinct approach on how to deal with suppliers is proposed (Caniels & Gelderman, 2005, p. 141; Gelderman & Mac Donald, 2008, p. 79; Van Weele, 2009, p. 204). Non-critical items are those with low supply risk and low profit impact. The purchaser should pay attention to efficient processing, product standardisation, inventory optimisation and order volume. Leverage items are characterised by low supply risk, but high profit impact, therefore, price reduction is of increased relevance. Tendering, target pricing and product substitution are means of exploiting purchasing power. Although profit impact is low, bottleneck items present a major risk to a buying company. This risk can be mitigated by backup plans, volume insurance, vendor control, or security of inventories. To strategic items procurement should pay the most

attention. These items have a high supply risk as well as a high profit impact. The focus of purchasers should, therefore, be on accurate demand forecasting, detailed market research, make-or-buy decisions, risk analysis, logistics, inventory and vendor control, contingency planning and long-term supply relationships (Kraljic, 1983, p. 112).

Different purchases require different buyer-supplier-relationships (Pagell, Wu, & Wasserman, 2010, p. 59). The kraljic matrix gives guidance to buying firms on how to manage these relationships. Partnerships, for example, are expensive and include a number of risks, hence, purchasers have to optimise the limited resources available. Suppliers of strategic items are those buying firms allocate its most resources to. The relationship with these suppliers should be close, trusting, and long-term. Since the exploitation of purchasing power is the focus for leverage items, buying firms do not invest in a relationship with the concerned suppliers. Non-critical items are typically purchased from multiple suppliers in a transaction-based manner. This indicates limited investment in the relationship. For bottleneck items, however, only a few sources of supply are available. Therefore, maintaining a good relationship with existing suppliers seems relevant in order to secure supply. However, looking for alternatives is also appropriate for items in this quadrant (Pagell, Wu, & Wasserman, 2010, p. 59).

Differentiated treatment of suppliers and distinct management of buyer-supplier relationships, can be assumed to have a major impact on the satisfaction of suppliers with the relationship. Since the classification of suppliers in the kraljic matrix gives guidance to buyers on how to manage these relationships, the influence on supplier satisfaction should be significant. However, even though a product is of strategic importance to the buyer, it does not need to have the same relevance for the supplier. The positioning of a product in the buyer's purchasing portfolio needs to fit the positioning in the supplier's customer portfolio in order to develop a good collaboration. A detailed understanding of the mutual dependency between supplier and buyer leads to more realistic expectations and helps to prevent disappointment (Van Weele, 2009, pp. 200-202). Therefore, in the following section customer portfolio analysis will be explained.

## 2.2.2 Customer portfolio analysis is about analysing the value of existing customers

Just as the kraljic matrix is about managing buyer-supplier relationships from the buyer's point of view, (industrial) customer portfolio analysis is used to manage this type of relationships from the supplier's point of view. Customer portfolio models focus on effective resource allocation by analysing the customer base and distinguishing between customers of different value to the supplier (Terho & Halinen, 2007, p. 721; Yorke & Droussiotis, 1994, p. 17). Classifications into portfolios can help retaining valuable customers, but also creating additional value with them. The position in the portfolio gives guidance on which relationship to develop, retain and nurture and which to eliminate (Thakur & Workman, 2016, p. 4095). The central goal of the portfolio analysis is to establish a well-balanced customer portfolio (Terho & Halinen, 2007, p. 721). According to Thakur and Workman (2016, p. 4096), an important aspect of customer portfolio management is not to define customer value in a strictly financial sense. Instead, companies should assess customer value in terms of the customers' current and projected contributions to the profitability of their company.

There are diverse portfolio models applying different portfolio parameters. Thakur and Workman (2016, p. 4096) propose the Customer Portfolio Management (CPM) matrix, in which

customers are divided into the following four quadrants: platinum, gold, silver, and bronze. The customers are classified based on their value to the company and cost to serve (low vs. high).

Value to the Company	High	Superior Service (Platinum Customer)	Best Service (Gold Customer)
	Low	Good Service (Silver Customer)	Better Service (Bronze Customer)
		Low	High
Cost to serve: Relative service level for optimal resource deployment			

**Figure 2: Customer Portfolio Management (CPM) matrix, (Thakur & Workman, 2016, p. 4096)**

According to this classification, customer relationships are developed. The different customer groups imply different treatment and strategies. Most resources should be allocated to those customers that offer the highest value to the company. Therefore, platinum customers, who are highly valuable and cost relatively little to serve, should receive the highest level of service. The company should put effort in the retention of such a relationship. On the opposite side, bronze customers are low in value and demand a high service level. Consequently, it is questionable whether the focal company should maintain or rather eliminate such a relationship. Silver customers have high potential because they are not very high in value, but also do not demand a high level of service. Gold customers are more demanding and more valuable to the company than silver customers, but still less valuable as platinum ones. Silver, as well as gold customers, should be further developed, moving them from silver into the gold or to the platinum customer group (Thakur & Workman, 2016, pp. 4097-4099).

The classification of customers determines the behaviour towards the customer and the relationship development. Higher investments in the relationship lead presumably to an improvement in relationship quality and are positively affecting the satisfaction with the exchange relationship. Furthermore, the concept of reciprocity indicates that relational investments of the supplier, lead to relational investments of the customer, too. Consequently customer portfolio analysis can have an impact on supplier satisfaction because it determines relational investments and the type of relationship.

Customer portfolio analysis is often used interchangeably with customer segmentation, however, these concepts differ significantly. While portfolio analysis focuses on analysing the value of existing customers, customer segmentation is mainly about segmenting the market based on criteria such as needs or buying behaviour in order to create a tailored marketing strategy (Terho & Halinen, 2007, pp. 721-722).

## 2.2.3 A high buyer status provides benefits to suppliers collaborating with that company

Buyer status in an externally attributed position in a social hierarchy (Patterson, Cavazos, & Washington, 2014, p. 74). More specifically explained, the status of a company depends on the centrality of its position within the market (Sauder, Lynn, & Podolny, 2012, p. 274). This position affects how a firm is perceived by other firms (Jensen & Roy, 2008, p. 496). Stern,

Dukerich, and Zajac (2014, p. 516) differentiate status, which is determined by “differences in social rank”, from reputation, which is determined by past performance. These two concepts are often used interchangeably because they are both a signal of quality (Jensen & Roy, 2008, p. 497).

A status is influencing external perceptions of organisational quality and performance. As a result, the status of a company can have an impact on the establishment of partnerships with other firms (Stern et al., 2014, p. 516). Swaminathan, Hoetker, and Mitchell (2002, p. 10) and Sauder et al. (2012, p. 272) suggest that especially in highly uncertain environments a high buyer status improves chances of attracting suppliers through its signalling mechanism and visibility. According to Piazza and Castellucci (2014, pp. 301-304) the function of a status can not only be classified as a signal, but also as an intangible asset for the organisation holding it, or as a mobile resource. This indicates that a status can be gained and lost. Companies with a high status “receive benefits beyond what they would receive based up on their performance or quality” (Patterson et al., 2014, p. 76). This is because status results from the status of social network relations and does not necessarily reflect actual performance (Patterson et al., 2014, p. 75; Sauder et al., 2012, p. 268). Consequently, the performance of a customer with a high status will be perceived better compared to a customer with a lower status with the same performance level. This is supported by Washington and Zajac (2005, p. 282) who state that social status can have an influence on the competitive position of a company, irrespective of performance.

Having a high status generates benefits or ‘privileges’ (Washington & Zajac, 2005, p. 284). Interacting with such an organisation can provide privileges and even enhance the own status of the company (Swaminathan et al., 2002, p. 9; Washington & Zajac, 2005, p. 286). Collaborating with a high ranked buyer is therefore very attractive from the supplier’s point of view because it can result in relevant benefits and competitive advantage. According to Castellucci and Ertug (2010, p. 14) in an exchange relationship with a high-status organisation the lower-status firm will make greater effort to compensate for status disadvantages. In short, a high buyer status makes the organisation more attractive to suppliers, it can provide privileges and competitive advantage to them. It can be assumed that this leads to increased supplier satisfaction. In turn, suppliers put greater effort into the relationship with a high ranked buyer, which can also have a positive effect on satisfaction.

### 3. METHODS: A CASE STUDY AT COMPANY X AND THREE SUPPLIERS

The research questions will be answered using a cross-sectional research design. The benefit of this research design is that associations can be tracked easily. Since the aim of the research question is to identify the relationship between the dependent variable (supplier satisfaction) and independent variables (factors causing supplier satisfaction), the cross-sectional design is appropriate. (Mann, 2003, pp. 56-57). The research will be of qualitative nature using a multiple case study. There will be one interview with each of the two purchasers of Company X (P1&P2) and one interview with each of the three suppliers (S1-S3). Qualitative research is most applicable here due to the nature of the research problem. The feeling of satisfaction in buyer-supplier relationships is a phenomenon about which is only little known. A qualitative methods can be used to explore such areas and create novel understandings, which may be more difficult to discover through more conventional methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 11). Hence, the data collection is based on two qualitative questionnaires – one for the purchasers and one for the suppliers. The questionnaires are based on earlier interviews

conducted by students who did research about the antecedents of preferred customer status. Some questions were added and some were modified to create a focus on supplier satisfaction, customer segmentation, the kraljic matrix and buyer status. The questions can be assigned into four categories: Classification, benefits, antecedents and buyer status. The interviews with the purchasers were held face-to-face, while the interviews with the suppliers were conducted by phone (due to the distance to these suppliers).

Case	Suppliers	Interview Partners
1	S1 (Supplier 1)	P1 (Purchaser 1), S1
2	S2 (Supplier 2)	P2 (Purchaser 2), S2
3	S3 (Supplier 3)	P2 (Purchaser 2), S3

## 4. COMPANY DESCRIPTIONS AND PRESENTATION OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Left out due to confidential information

## 5. FINDINGS DISCUSSED AGAINST LITERATURE AND ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 5.1 Relational Behaviour, Operative Excellence and Profitability are Confirmed First-Tier Antecedents of Supplier Satisfaction

All in all, each of the three suppliers is satisfied with their exchange relationship with Company X. Most frequently mentioned factors causing this satisfaction are the way of collaboration and interaction (S1, S2, S3) including the honest and friendly communication (S1) even in case of requests and problems on the supplier side (S3). Smaller issues are discussed in an uncomplicated manner (S3) and Company X always showed goodwill in case of delivery delays (S1). Furthermore, S2 appreciated that they have a contact partner, who they know in person. All these factors can be best classified as relational behaviour, which is a previously identified antecedent of supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2014, pp. 711-712; Vos et al., 2016, pp. 4620-4621). S3 also puts emphasis on the customer’s reliability. This includes punctual and autonomous payment (S3), timely submission of documents (S3), and order adherence (S3). Also in literature, reliability is considered as a significant driver of supplier satisfaction (Hüttinger et al., 2014, pp. 711-712; Vos et al., 2016, pp. 4620-4621), which is positively influencing relational behaviour.

Relational behaviour including reliability are social factors that have an impact on the satisfaction of suppliers, but also economic factors were mentioned. According to S1 and S2 higher purchase volumes would further increase their satisfaction. Larger quantities are positively influencing the perceptions of suppliers that the relationship is leading to higher profits of the own company. For that reason, purchase volume can be attributed to profitability – a first-tier antecedent identified by Vos et al. (2016, pp. 4620-4621). Moreover, late feedback on product samples and late submission of complaints were identified as factors causing dissatisfaction in the exchange relationship (S2). An improvement in speed of these submissions would positively influence the supplier’s perceptions that operations are handled efficiently and would facilitate the supplier’s way of doing business. Clearly, these factors can be classified under the concept of operative excellence, which also was identified as a significant first-tier antecedent of supplier satisfaction in indirect as well as direct procurement by Vos et al. (2016, pp. 4620-



4621). The influence of operative excellence on direct procurement is supported by this case study, however, no evidence for the impact of the remaining antecedents in the model of Vos et al. (2016, p. 4620) could be found, which include involvement, support, contact accessibility, innovation potential and growth opportunity. (Vos et al., 2016, pp. 4620-4621).

Supplier 2 stated that an enhanced long-term planning possibility would increase supplier satisfaction. This could be achieved through earlier notifications about sales plans (S2), thus, the factor is not about the supplier's participation in the customer's product development, but instead, it is about information sharing. Consequently, the driver cannot be assigned to the previously identified second-tier antecedent called involvement (Vos et al., 2016, pp. 4620-4621), nonetheless a new factor can be added, namely information sharing. The concept of information sharing in this case describes the supplier's perception that the customer shares relevant information with the supplier in a timely manner, which facilitates the business of the supplier. This new factor can be classified as a second-tier antecedent of supplier satisfaction, influencing relational behaviour. All antecedents described and related to literature can be found in appendix 2, table 2.

In conclusion, the focus of the suppliers was mainly on Company X's relational behaviour, when assessing their satisfaction. There was overall agreement on the positive impact of the pleasant collaboration and interaction between Company X and suppliers. Furthermore, Supplier 2 added information sharing as part of relational behaviour to the factors with an influence on supplier satisfaction and Supplier 3 put emphasis on the reliability of a customer. However, while supplier 3 considered only relational factors, S1 and S2 also took economic factors into account. For both of them, profitability has an influence on satisfaction. Supplier 2 adds operative excellence as another economic antecedent. These findings support the statement that suppliers consider social and economic factors the most Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 712).

The identified antecedents are partially mirrored in the mentioned efforts of Company X to increase supplier satisfaction. These include personal contact, the way of collaboration and interaction. In addition to that, P2 mentioned that Company X dispenses with small reclamations of supplier deliveries. This was not directly considered by the suppliers, still Company X's friendly and understanding behaviour in problem situations was appreciated by S1 and S3, which could include this aspect. Additionally, supplier support was a mentioned effort by P1, but not by the suppliers. This is probably due to the fact that the studied suppliers are all A-suppliers that do not need any support from their customers. P1 expected the high number of required documents and their particularly high quality requirements causing dissatisfaction of suppliers, but they were not identified as influential factors causing dissatisfaction during the supplier interviews. In addition to that Company X could improve supplier satisfaction through earlier integration in planning (P2), which is in line with statements of S2.

## 5.2 The Kraljic Matrix, Customer Portfolio Analysis, and Buyer Status Differ in Their Influence on Supplier Satisfaction

### 5.2.1 *The kraljic matrix has a direct impact on supplier satisfaction*

According to estimations of Company X's purchasers rice (P2) and vegetable mixtures (P1) can be classified as leverage items and grain as a strategic item (P2). According to the estimations of S1, vegetable mixtures can be best classified as non-critical items. This categorisation generally coincides with that of Company X. However, although the profit impact of the items is

low, they are an important part of many products of Company X's convenience segment. Consequently, they have a high strategic impact for the company and can be better classified as leverage items. From Company X's point of view, S2 considers grains to be leverage items with high profit impact and rather low supply risk. P2 of Company X classified the supply risk as rather high, leading to a classification in the strategic items quadrant. S3 thought that rice is a non-critical item for Company X because of a low profit impact and a low supply risk. But in fact, the profit impact is high for the buying firm (P2). That is why rice is classified as a leverage item by Company X. The supplier's self-assessment of classification disagrees with the categorisation of Company X in various aspects. One reason for that could be the broad product range of Company X, which makes it difficult to estimate which goods really matter for the company. Moreover, supply risk was difficult to assess for all suppliers. This is on the one hand a matter of interpretation and on the other hand of subjective perception. A comparison of the actual and perceived position of suppliers in the kraljic matrix can be found in appendix 3, figure 4.

Grain is considered as strategic item. According to theory, the relationship with a supplier of such an item should be close, long-term, and trusting, requiring high investments in the relationship (Pagell et al., 2010, p. 59). This proposed strategy is in line with Company X's way of handling buyer-supplier relationships in practice. Regarding leverage items theory states that customers should not invest in a relationship with suppliers of these goods, instead they should focus on exploiting purchasing power in order to cut down prices (Pagell et al., 2010, p. 59). Anyhow, Company X's sustainability concept and its desire for long-term partnerships with suppliers prevents the company from exploiting purchasing power. The relationship to suppliers is of great importance to Company X. One reason for that is that switching suppliers requires a lot of time and effort. Additionally, they put more emphasis on quality than on price, which also makes the actions proposed by theory less applicable. Consequently, Company X treats all suppliers as such of strategic items. The classification in a quadrant of the kraljic matrix has no significant impact on the behaviour towards suppliers (P1). From this, it can be concluded that the categorization in the kraljic matrix has no significant impact on supplier satisfaction.

At the same time the results indicate that the kraljic matrix can have an influence on supplier satisfaction when the company sticks to the proposed purchasing strategies. Company X treated all suppliers as strategic suppliers even though not all of them were (in terms of profit impact and supply risk) and all suppliers showed great satisfaction with the exchange relationship. Fewer investments into the relationship, as they are proposed for example for suppliers of bottleneck or leverage items, probably would have led to lower supplier satisfaction.

Company X applied its own method of supplier segmentation by categorising suppliers in A-, B-, C-, or D-suppliers. This categorisation affects from which supplier the company orders at first, and which supplier represents the alternative. S1, S2 and S3 are all A-suppliers of Company X. It follows that purchase quantities are largest for suppliers of this category. As outlined earlier in this discussion, purchase volume contributes to the perceived profitability of the exchange relationship, which is a first-tier antecedent of supplier satisfaction by Vos et al. (2016, pp. 4620-4621), thus the influence of Company X's supplier segmentation method on supplier satisfaction is probably significant. For a more detailed analysis about the impact on supplier satisfaction, results should be compared to a supplier of another category. Moreover, purchase volume was mentioned as a factor affecting the (preferred) customer status of a company

(S1, S2, S3). Supplier segmentation could have a significant impact on this concept, as well.

### ***5.2.2 The impact of customer portfolio analysis on supplier satisfaction is only indirect***

The studied suppliers do not formally classify customers, therefore, no customer portfolio analysis method is applied. Only informally, the customers are distinguished in value to the supplier. The used dimensions vary among the studied cases: While for S1 and S3 purchase volume was the first criteria mentioned along which they distinguish customers, S2 put most emphasis on the length of the relationship, but also purchase volume is not unconsidered by S2. Next to purchase volume growth opportunity and handling of complaints are relevant, representing the economical aspect of customer differentiation, while the length of the relationship and reliability are social dimensions applied by S2. S1 and S3, too, applied social as well as economic criteria. Large order volumes, the frequency of orders and the business relationship, punctual payment and frequency of order modification are major drivers for S3. S1 mentioned that customers purchasing large volumes receive some benefits, but also the mode of interaction was considered as an influential factor.

Customers that score well on these economic and relational criteria receive some benefits from suppliers such as preferential resource allocation or fast delivery. These benefits are not offered to all customers, therefore the classification of customers has an influence on the supplier's behaviour. Relational investments are higher for a preferred customer such as Company X, leading to an improved relationship quality, which in turn will positively influence the satisfaction with the relationship. Based on the norms of reciprocity promoted by SET, relational investments of the supplier will also lead to relational investments of the buying company in order to give back relational benefits. Considering the supplier classification from Company X's point of view, the results show that the mutual positioning of buyer and suppliers are aligned. Both sides see each other as a key exchange partner and invest into the relationship.

Thus, even though no formal customer portfolio analysis method was applied by the suppliers, it can be said that customer classification is having an influence on supplier satisfaction because it determines investments into the relationship and the type of relationship. Referring to the model of Vos et al. (2016, p. 4620) the classification of customers can be identified as a second-tier antecedent which is exerting indirect influence on supplier satisfaction through relational behaviour.

### ***5.2.3 Buyer Status has no influence on supplier satisfaction in this case study***

Two suppliers (S1, S2) consider Company X as a high-status company within the organic food industry. Although, they are not the market leader in terms of market share (S2), Company X is described as a pioneer (S1), which developed a good standing in the market (S1, S2). The long history (S2) and experience of the company (S1, S2) are positively influencing the perceptions of Company X's status, which serves as a signal of high quality (S2). According to the purchasers, Company X is considered an important player in the organic food industry, as well (P1, P2). Their estimations match with the statements of S1 and S2. P1 describes Company X as a pioneer, as well and considers the long-lasting history of the company as a factor shaping its status. P2 puts emphasis on the good reputation of Company X. Additional factors that could influence the impression of the company's status were the brand identity (P1), its innovativeness (P1) and loyalty (P2). Nevertheless, the suppliers did not mention these factors during the interviews.

The third Supplier (S3) had difficulties in assessing Company X's status. A company's status is nothing that receives consideration and thus it is not affecting behaviour towards customers at all (S3). Also for S1 and S2 status is not considered as important in their exchange relationships. S1 is not always aware of a client's status, either. Thus, the behaviour of all studied cases is not significantly affected by buyer status. Only a very bad status that would harm the credibility of the organic quality of products from S2 would affect their business relationship (S2). P1's estimations agree with these findings. The influence of Company X's status was considered to have no or only a very minor impact on supplier's behaviour. Other factors such as the business relationship and purchasing quantity are far more important (P1). P2 has a different opinion. According to him, the status plays an important role for suppliers and is positively influencing supplier behaviour towards Company X. This opinion disagrees with the interview results.

To sum up, the buyer status - if at all known - is not important to suppliers. As a result, it can be concluded that the buyer status has no impact on supplier satisfaction. The buyer status is also not affecting investments into the relationship, which could have improved relationship quality and also satisfaction with the relationship. No evidence for buyer status influencing supplier satisfaction could be found in this case study. However, the insignificance of buyer status could be industry specific. One possible reason for that may be that relationships in the organic sector tend to be long-term and close in general. A high status could lead only to minor improvements in the exchange relationship. Further, according to literature, a status is especially relevant in highly uncertain environments because it is a signal of quality. Nevertheless, the organic food industry is subject to strict quality requirements, each company has to adhere to anyway. The quality of products is tested regularly throughout the production process. Hence, there is only little uncertainty in the industry and a signalling of quality through the status of a company is less important.

## **5.3 Conclusion: Some Existing Factors Confirmed and One Factor Added to Literature**

By conducting a multiple case study with Company X and three of its suppliers a variety of antecedents of supplier satisfaction have been identified. Relational factors, namely reliability and relational behaviour seemed to be the most influential ones, but also operative excellence and profitability were considered economic factors leading to satisfaction of suppliers. Information sharing could be identified as a new antecedent of supplier satisfaction. These findings are providing the answer to the first research question and are contributing to the results of previous studies.

Further, the impact of three new concepts on supplier satisfaction has been examined. These include the kraljic matrix, customer portfolio analysis, and buyer status. Sub-questions 1-3 are concerned with this examination. From the case study, it can be concluded that customer portfolio analysis and the kraljic matrix have an influence on supplier satisfaction as long as the company sticks to the proposed purchasing strategies. While referring to the kraljic matrix, the effect on supplier satisfaction is direct, customer portfolio analysis is only indirectly influencing supplier satisfaction through relational behaviour. Regarding the model of Vos et al. (2016, p. 4620) the kraljic matrix can be added as a first-tier antecedent and customer portfolio analysis as a second-tier antecedent of supplier satisfaction. Buyer status turned out to have no significant influence on supplier satisfaction. However, the results are likely to be industry-specific.



## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS TO COMPANY X CAN BE GIVEN BUT LIMITATIONS PROHIBIT GENERALIZATION

### 6.1 Results Should Be Examined with a Larger Sample

The research was conducted through face-to-face and telephone interviews. Interviews can lead to response bias because respondents want to look as good as possible (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002, pp. 247-249). Due to the sensible nature of buyer-supplier relationships and the possibility that the other party could see the given answers, this bias is very likely. Further, results of this research cannot be generalised due to the small sample size. In order to ensure generalisability, a larger sample is necessary. Nonetheless, the results of this research are not necessarily invalid and can provide the basis for hypotheses in future studies.

As there is still relatively little research about the drivers of supplier satisfaction, this area needs to be expanded. It would be interesting to explore the impact of different industry settings on the concept. Two of the three studied suppliers assigned a preferred customer status to Company X based on the length of their relationship (S1, S2). According to the model of Vos et al. (2016, p. 4620), this aspect has no significant impact on the customer's status. This relationship may be unique in this industry and should be explored further. Moreover, suppliers of different classifications should be analysed and compared in order to ensure a stronger explanatory power of supplier segmentation methods on supplier satisfaction. Finally, the relationship between supplier satisfaction and the new antecedent "information sharing" should be explored in future research.

### 6.2 Practical Evidence for the Influence of Various Factors on Supplier Satisfaction Could Have Been Found

This study made a number of contributions to existing supplier satisfaction literature. Firstly, it offered practical evidence for the influence of different factors on supplier satisfaction. The study tested previously identified antecedents by Vos et al. (2016, pp. 4620-4621) in the organic food industry. While some of the antecedents could have been confirmed, others found no support in this case study. Nonetheless both, the economic and relational dimensions of supplier satisfaction, clearly emerged from this research and one new antecedent could have been added. The study elaborated on the influence of three additional concepts on supplier satisfaction, namely, supplier segmentation into the Kraljic matrix, customer portfolio analysis, and buyer status. From the findings of the case study, it can be concluded that the Kraljic matrix has a direct, and customer portfolio analysis has an indirect influence on supplier satisfaction. Buyer status turned out to have no impact.

### 6.3 Supplier Satisfaction Can Be Improved through Timely submission of Documents and by Enabling Suppliers to Plan on a Longer-Term Basis

Company X is already doing well in satisfying their suppliers, who put a strong emphasis on relational behaviour of their customers. It is advisable that Company X continues to ensure a friendly relationship between staff and the supplier in the future, in order to maintain a high degree of satisfaction. In addition to that, satisfaction can be further improved by providing their suppliers with a greater long-term planning possibility through earlier integration. Moreover, suppliers identified the timely submission of documents, feedback and complaints as significant

drivers of satisfaction. While one supplier was satisfied with that, another supplier indicated that there is room for further improvement. The length of the buyer-supplier relationships and purchase volume were identified as the most important drivers for assigning Company X a preferred status. Their sustainability concept and a steady growth of the company will help to secure preferential treatment from suppliers in the future.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1, table 1

**Table 1 Definition of constructs; Based on: Hüttinger et al. (2014, p. 703)**

<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<b>Profitability</b>	Profitability refers to the suppliers perception that the relationship with the customer is positively influencing the profitability of the company in terms of high margins and good profits (Vos et al., 2016, p. 4619)
<b>Growth opportunity</b>	Growth opportunity refers to the suppliers' ability to grow together with the buying firm and to generate new potential business opportunities through the relationship
Innovation potential	Innovation potential is understood as the supplier's opportunity to generate innovations in the exchange relationship due to the buying firm's innovative capabilities and its contribution in joint innovation processes
<b>Operative excellence</b>	Operative excellence is the supplier's perception that the buying firm's operations are handled in a sorrow and efficient way, which facilitates the way of doing business for the supplier
Contact accessibility	A customer's contact accessibility refers to the availability of a person who intensively shapes and advances exchange processes and reflects the buying firm's willingness to develop structural bonds with the supplier
<b>Relational behaviour</b>	Relational behaviour refers to the buying firm's behaviour towards the supplier with regards to the relational focus of exchange capturing multiple facets of the exchange behaviour such as solidarity, mutuality, and flexibility
Reliability	Reliability is defined as the supplier's perception that the buying firm acts in a consistent as well as reliable manner and fulfils its agreements
Involvement	A customer's supplier involvement describes the degree to which the supplier's staff participates directly in the customer's product development team and is entrusted with developing product ideas
Support of Suppliers	Support of suppliers as offered by the buying firm is characterized as its effort or assistance to increase a supplier's performance and/or capabilities

### Appendix 2, table 2

**Table 2 Antecedents of supplier satisfaction**

<b>Antecedents of SS identified in the case study</b>	<b>Antecedents identified by Vos et al. (2016, pp. 4620-4621)</b>
Good and pleasant collaboration & interaction (S1, S2, S3) lead to high supplier satisfaction (incl. goodwill of Company X in case of delivery delays (S1), honest and friendly interaction (S1), uncomplicated handling of smaller issues (S3), friendliness in case of requests and problems from the supplier side (S3))	Relational behaviour
Higher purchase volumes, would further increase satisfaction (S1, S2)	Profitability
Contact partner, who they know in person (S2) cause supplier satisfaction	Relational behaviour
Late submission of feedback on product samples and of complaints causes dissatisfaction (S2)	Operative excellence
Earlier integration in planning would further enhance supplier satisfaction (S2)	-
Reliability of customers (S3) causes supplier satisfaction (incl. timely and independent submission of contracts & payments, order adherence (S3))	Reliability

Appendix 3, figure 4

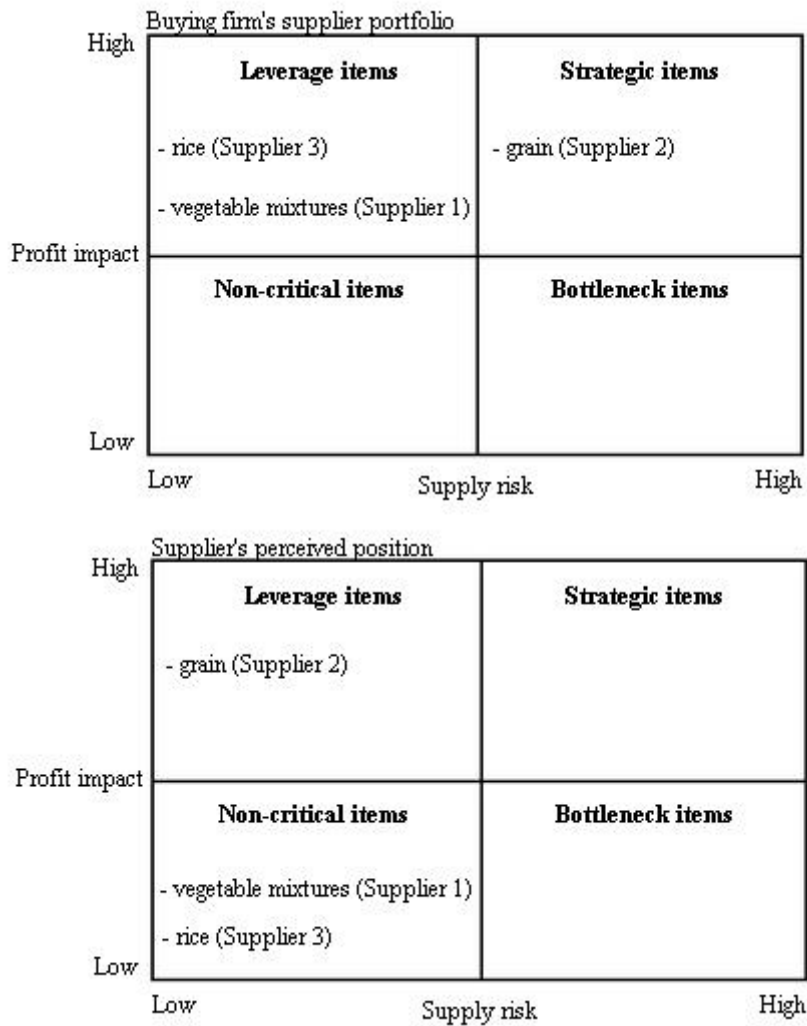


Figure 3 Comparison of actual and perceived position in the kraljic matrix

### Fragebogen für die Einkäufer

#### Klassifizierung

1. Klassifizieren Sie die Beziehung, die Sie mit Lieferanten haben? Wenn das so ist, wie?
2. Haben Sie Hinweise darauf, dass die Lieferanten das gleiche mit Ihnen machen?
3. Gibt es Management-Engagement für die Erreichung der Lieferantenzufriedenheit (außer mehr zu bezahlen)? Wenn ja, welche Lieferanten versuchen Sie am meisten zu befriedigen? Bei welchen Lieferanten legen Sie besonderen Wert auf ihre Zufriedenheit?
4. Wenn es Engagement für die Erreichung eines bevorzugten Kundenstatus mit strategischen Lieferanten gibt, wie zeigt sich das?
5. Was glauben Sie, für welchen Lieferanten besitzt Ihr Unternehmen einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus?
6. Wie hoch ist das Lieferantenspezifische Versorgungsrisiko? Stehen viele Lieferanten für die jeweiligen Produkte zur Verfügung? (Kraljic Matrix)
7. Was ist die strategische Bedeutung der Ware dieser Lieferanten für Ihre Organisation? Wie wichtig ist das Produkt, das dieser Lieferant Ihnen bietet? Hat das Produkt eine große Auswirkung auf den Gewinn Ihres Unternehmens? (Kraljic Matrix)
8. Warum haben Sie Ihre aktuellen Lieferanten gewählt und keine Anderen?
9. Haben Sie mehr als einen Lieferanten für die jeweilige Ware?

#### Vorteile

10. Ist Ihnen jemals aufgefallen, dass Sie von einigen (zufriedenen) Lieferanten Vorteile erhalten haben? Haben Sie von kürzere Lieferzeiten, niedrigeren Einkaufspreisen, einen besseren Zugang zu innovativen Fertigkeiten oder gemeinsamen Entwicklungsprojekten profitiert? Geben Sie bitte konkrete Beispiele.
11. Welche anderen Vorteile konnten Sie durch das Zufriedenstellen der Lieferanten bzw. durch einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus erreichen? Geben Sie bitte konkrete Beispiele.
12. Für welche Vorteile müssen Sie bezahlen und welche werden Ihnen kostenlos angeboten?
13. Werden Ihnen Vorteile angeboten, die andere Unternehmen nicht erhalten?

#### Ursachen/frühere Vorgänge

14. Gibt es Aktionen, die Sie nicht unternommen haben, die bei der Erreichung der Lieferantenzufriedenheit / eines bevorzugten Kundenstatus hätten helfen können?
15. Gibt es Maßnahmen, die geplant sind, um Lieferanten in der Zukunft zu befriedigen bzw. um ein bevorzugter Kunde für Lieferanten zu werden?
16. Ist Ihr Unternehmen in der Lage, Lieferantenzufriedenheit von wichtigen Lieferanten herzustellen? Welche Faktoren bewirken diese Zufriedenheit?
17. Welche Faktoren rufen Unzufriedenheit des Lieferanten hervor?

#### Status

18. Welchen Status hat Unternehmen X (ihrer Meinung nach)?
19. Welche Faktoren beeinflussen die Meinung Außenstehender über das Unternehmen positiv und welche negativ?
20. Was glauben Sie, wie wichtig ist Unternehmen Xs Status für Lieferanten?
21. Glauben Sie, dass der Status das Verhalten von Lieferanten gegenüber Unternehmen X beeinflusst? Wenn ja, wie?

## Fragebogen für Lieferanten

### Klassifizierung

1. Weisen Sie Ihren Kunden unterschiedliche Status zu? Welche Statusarten weisen Sie zu? Welche Dimensionen nutzen Sie? (Welche Kriterien werden berücksichtigt?)
2. Ordnen Sie dem Kundenunternehmen als Ganzes, oder den verschiedenen Abteilungen/Zweigniederlassungen einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus zu?
3. Haben Sie einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus an Unternehmen X vergeben?
4. Wo würden Sie sich selbst in der Kraljic Matrix sehen (aus der Sicht von Unternehmen X)? (Hat das Produkt eine hohe oder niedrige Gewinnauswirkung auf Unternehmen X? Besteht ein eher niedriges oder hohes Versorgungsrisiko für das Produkt das Sie verkaufen?)

### Vorteile

5. Wie beeinflussen die Statustypen Ihr Verhalten gegenüber Kunden?
6. Welche Vorteile bieten Sie einem bevorzugten Kunden an? (Innovationen, Sonderdienste, Flexibilität, gemeinsame Produktionsplanung etc.)
7. Können Sie noch zufriedener mit dem Käufer sein, als Sie es jetzt sind? Welche Vorteile würden Sie dem Käufer dann bieten?

### Ursachen/frühere Vorgänge

8. Sind Sie mit der Geschäftsbeziehung mit Unternehmen X zufrieden? Welche Faktoren beeinflussen Ihre Zufriedenheit?
9. Welche Faktoren sorgen in dieser Beziehung für Unzufriedenheit?
10. Was ist Ihre Motivation Unternehmen X einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus zuzuteilen? Was könnte Unternehmen X tun um seinen Status weiterhin zu verbessern?
11. Ist Unternehmen X sich seines Status bewusst? Lassen Sie Ihre bevorzugten Unternehmen von ihrem Status wissen?
12. Was sind Maßnahmen die ein Kunde treffen muss, um einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus zu erreichen und wie sieht das notwendige Verhalten aus?
13. Was tun die Kunden im Allgemeinen, um einen bevorzugten Kundenstatus zu erreichen? Wie versuchen Kunden Sie zufrieden zu stellen? Unterscheidet sich dieses Verhalten von dem, das Sie sich wünschen?

### Status

14. Wie sehen Sie den Status von Unternehmen X?
15. Durch welche Faktoren wird der Status von Unternehmen X positiv/negativ beeinflusst?
16. Wie wichtig ist der Status eurer Kunden für euer Unternehmen?
17. Wie beeinflusst der Status eurer Kunden euer Verhalten gegenüber diesen Unternehmen?
18. Wie beeinflusst der Status von Unternehmen X euer Verhalten?
19. Haben Kunden mit einem hohen Status Vorteile? Welche?