PERCEPTION DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES REGARDING SUPPLIER SATISFACTION – A CASE STUDY

Master thesis

Student: B.D.B. (Bas) Brake, te

University of Twente

Faculty: Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences

Programme: Master in Business Administration

Track: Purchase and Supply Management

First supervisor: Dr. A.G. Sigurdardottir

Second supervisor: Prof. Dr. habil. H. Schiele

Groenlo, 15 January, 2019

Final version

Abstract

The conducted research involves the exploration, which consists of a description and explanation, of possible perception differences regarding supplier satisfaction within a buyer-supplier relationship. The goal of this master thesis is to answer the following research question "how is supplier satisfaction perceived from the buyer and supplier's perspectives? " The research was conducted at Alpha and included in total nineteen semi-structured interviews. Five participants from the buyer's perspective were interviewed and fourteen participants divided among six strategic suppliers were interviewed. The collected data is analysed through a thematic framework approach, in order to compare within and between cases, thus the buyer's and supplier's perspective. Results indicate that the buyer's and supplier's perception in the conducted research, differ regarding some aspects on supplier satisfaction, this is relevant for both the buyer's and supplier's perspective, due to that perception gaps can provide a source for misunderstandings. However, considering the amount of analysed data it can be stated that 'perceptual distance' regarding 'supplier satisfaction' is limited. Based upon the concept of 'social identification in organisational settings' an explanation is provided why actors perceive 'supplier satisfaction' differently or similarly. It is assumed that an actor can identify himself on 1) organisational 2) team or subunit 3) or occupational level to evaluate 'supplier satisfaction. This new insight contributes to a better understanding to the observed gap in literature if 'supplier satisfaction' is establish between entire organisations or individuals.[1] Another finding is that a supplier can be satisfied, while the supplier perceives that the relationship is not profitable.[2] A third contribution to existing research is that a distinction should be made between how satisfied a supplier is with the operative excellence of a buyer, when the supplier serves multiple business units from the buyer's perspective. A final contribution is that results indicate that perception gaps are limited regarding supplier-satisfaction in a buyer-supplier relationship. Additionally, results do not indicate that there occurred any conflict caused by perception differences[3] A limitation of the research is the cross-language setting of the interviewed participants, which threatens the validity of the research. In order to reduce the threat of the

---

1 See Hüttinger et al. (2012), p. 1204
2 See Vos et al. (2016), p. 4614
3 See Praxmer-Carus et al. (2013), p. 203

cross-language setting constructs were defined and an interview guide was developed, which increased the consistency of the research.

Table of contents:

Index of figures

Index of tables

1. The need to determine if the buyer and supplier's perception about the quality of the relationship differ

Nowadays the relationship of an organisation with their supplier(s) is recognized as a potential tool to improve organisational performance. Since the increased attention given to purchasing as a strategic tool, companies reduced their supply base and invested in long-term supplier relationships.[4] A requirement to develop from a buyer's perspective, a powerful relationship with a supplier is to have a small number of suppliers. The developments of supply base reduction and long-term supplier development has lead organisations move towards a more cooperative, mutually-beneficial relationship with their supplier. Due to a reduced supply base and outsourcing of production activities organisations increased their dependency on their supply base.[5] It can be stated that changes within the supply base has changed the current buyer-supplier's relationships.

As a consequence of these developments' organisations are developing collaborative relationships with their environment. Organisations are building collaborative relationships with their supply chain partners in order to improve organisational performance such as, efficiency, flexibility and competitive advantage. Such collaborative relationships require a long-term approach with joint involvement of both parties in order to create unique value, in which a partner can't operate independently.[6] According to the literature preferred customers are expected to gain competitive advantage, an advantage obtained due to preferential treatment from their supplier. The special form of customer attractiveness is referred as 'preferred customer'. In order to obtain a preferential treatment, the concepts of customer attractiveness and supplier satisfaction are claimed to play a role.[7] The preferential treatment "(…) received from a buyer perspective includes preferential resource allocation and pricing behaviour"[8]. A literature stream that builds on these developments is the introduced concept of 'preferred customer'. As a consequence of increased significance of collaborative relationships, the concept of preferred customer is introduced in the field of suppliers' management.

---

4 See Sarkar and Mohapatra (2006), p. 148.
5 See Tan et al. (1998), "p. 2815-2816"
6 See Sarkar and Mohapatra (2006), p.148
7 See Pulles et al. (2016), "p. 129-131"
8See Schiele et al. (2011), "p. 3-8"

Within the concept of 'preferred customer' a clarification of identified issues in previous studies is desired. A general question regarding customer attractiveness, supplier satisfaction and preferred customer status is "(..)if these concepts are developed at between individuals or between firms e.g. are entire firms satisfied with each other, or individuals satisfied with their peers from the other perspective satisfied with each other."[9] Additionally, preferred customers have better access to suppliers' technological capabilities. Furthermore, the overall qualitative judgement of a supplier motivates suppliers exchange behaviour. Due to this reason "(…) preferred customers should assess the perceived quality "supplier satisfaction" of their suppliers."[10] To conclude according to literature customers should consistently determine if suppliers are satisfied and how satisfaction is developed.

In alignment with the previous identified statements, other scholars emphasized the need of research regarding dyadic relationships. In addition"(…) potential perception gaps are relevant for investigation because they provide sources for misunderstandings that can lead to the dissatisfaction of a partner and the consequent termination of the business relationship by that partner."[11] Moreover, there is a lack of studies that focus on a dyadic perspective in the literature stream of buyer – supplier relationships, since most studies focus on the buyer's perspective In addition, previous studies indicate that partners within a supply chain can have different perceptions about the quality of a relationship.[12] The perceived quality of the relationship "supplier satisfaction" is "(...)mainly driven by the nature of the buyer – supplier relationship, and not on performance."[13] Hence it can be concluded that a research regarding supplier satisfaction from a dyadic view enriches our understanding of supplier satisfaction as a part of the concept of 'preferred customer'. The focus of the research is on one specific element within, of the introduced concept preferred customer, namely 'supplier satisfaction', and how supplier satisfaction is perceived from both perspectives with in a buyer – supplier relationship

---

9 See Hüttinger et al. (2012), p. 1204
10 See Ellis et al. (2012), "p. 1265-1266"
11 See Praxmer-Carus et al. (2013), p. 203
12 See Chen et al. (2016), p. 312
13 See Benton and Maloni (2005), p. 19

1.1 The goal to describe and explain (potential) perception differences regarding supplier satisfaction

To begin with since a dyadic view of supplier satisfaction enriches our understanding of supplier satisfaction, the purpose of this thesis is *'The exploration, explanation and description, of (potential) perception differences regarding supplier satisfaction within a buyer-supplier relationship'*. The goal of this study leads to the following main-research question: "How is supplier satisfaction perceived from both buyers and supplier's perspectives". Supported by the following sub questions 1) How can differences and similarities between or within both perspectives be explained? 2) How is 'supplier satisfaction' between buyer-supplier in the current relationship perceived and described? This includes different purchasing functions across business units from both a buyer and suppliers' perspective.

1.2 A dyadic view regarding supplier satisfaction enriches our understanding of the buyer-supplier relationship

To date most conducted studies regarding buyer-supplier relationships, focused on the buyers – perspective. Among a review of four academic journals about buyer-supplier relationship studies between 1986 and 2005, of the 151 buyer-supplier studies in only six studies both the buyer and supplier participated.[14] By focussing on a dyadic perspective this research contributes to the stream of literature on supplier satisfaction and buyer – supplier relationships. The contribution of this research is relevant for academic and practical purposes for several reasons: A one-sided analysis focusses one subject that frequently consist of two-sides, which is the cases in a buyer-supplier relationship. Due to an overlap and contrast in a dyadic analysis it is possible to enhance the understanding the nature from a buyer – supplier relationship.[15] By analysing the relationship on micro-level between micro-dyads a better understanding of the explanatory power of this level of analysis is gained.[16] Furthermore, as described earlier (potential) perception gaps are relevant for investigation, since perception gaps can lead to misunderstanding and dissatisfaction. Therefore, this research contributes to a better understanding on which aspects the buyer's and supplier's perspective differ regarding 'supplier satisfaction'.

---

14 See Terpend et al. (2008), p. 41
15 See Eisikovits and Koren (2010), "p. 1642-1644"
16 See Schiele et al.(2012), p. 1183

In the first chapter of this thesis the research goal and the relevance of the research are discussed. Followed by a literature review in chapter two and in chapter three the research method is explained. In chapter four the empirical results, similarities and differences regarding 'supplier satisfaction' from a dyadic perspective are presented. Finally, in chapter five conclusions, future research recommendations and limitations are discussed. The research only focusses on individuals involved into the purchasing process, strategic or operational from a buyer's perspective and its strategic key suppliers. Furthermore, the research focusses on the concept of 'supplier satisfaction'. According to existing literature a buyer-supplier relationship is affected by many factors e.g. communication, trust, power-dependency and commitment, these factors are however not researched in this study.[17] There are several constructs that contribute to supplier satisfaction. For this research the identified categories by Hüttinger et al. (2014) are used in order to answer the research. The identified categories are; growth opportunity, innovation potential, operative excellence, reliability, support of suppliers, supplier involvement, contact accessibility and relational behaviour.[18] An overview of the constructs which are included in this research are presented in the research model in paragraph 3.4. To answer the stated research, question the next chapter will explain and discuss relevant theoretical concepts. The third section of this thesis clarifies how data is gathered and analysed, followed by an analysis and the results of the retrieved data. In the final part the conclusions, limitations and future research directions are discussed.

---

17 See Essig and Amann (2009), p. 103
18 See Hüttinger et al.(2014), "p. 711-713"

2. A review of relevant literature in order to answer the research question

To start with a recent stream in literature introduced the concept of 'preferred customer' as a special kind of customer attractiveness. In this chapter the concept of 'preferred customer' is clarified. To begin with the reasoning behind the concept is explained. Followed by a review of the perceived benefits and disadvantages obtained through to the concept of 'preferred customer' Furthermore, the social exchange theory is reviewed as an explanation in order to obtain the status of a 'preferred customer'.

2.1.1 Preferred customer a new approach in order to gain competitive advantage

A definition of preferential treatment received by a buyer is "(…) A firm has preferred customer status with a supplier, if the supplier offers the buyer preferential resource allocation."[19] Preferred customer status can be established in several ways. In the stream of literature 'preferred customers' are expected to gain competitive advantage, an advantage obtained due to preferential treatment received from their supply base. Competing organisations might utilize the same supply base, therefore it is not certain that a buying organisation which collaborates with their supply base gains competitive advantage.[20] Therefore, it is assumed that buying organisations that obtain better resources than their competitors from their supply base gain competitive advantage

From a traditional point of view in marketing literature, suppliers attempt to be attractive as possible for (potential) buyers. In the traditional marketing approach supplying organisations are assumed to be attractive in order to attract possible buyers. They argued the traditional point of view, by exploring the perspective of buyers to be attractive as possible for suppliers. There are several reasons why the traditional marketing approach, where supplier intend to attract (potential) buyers, has been argued. The developments regarding supply base reduction and long-term supplier development, has lead organisations move towards a more cooperative, mutually-beneficial relationship with their suppliers. Due to a reduced supply base and increase in the outsourcing of production activities, organisations increased their dependency on their supply

---

19 See Steinle & Schiele. (2008), p. 11
20 See Pulles et al. (2016), p. 130

base.[21] Another driver is the highly competitive environment, which can be described as an 'outsourcing economy'. An outsourcing economy is characterized by an increased focus on organisational activities and utilizing external resources, capabilities and competencies at the same time.[22]As a consequence of the developments within the supply base, a new concept was introduced in which a buyer tries to be attractive as possible for the supply base.

The importance of an organisation which got awarded with the concept of 'preferred customer' is emphasized, when a situation of scarcity of capable suppliers occurs. [23]A proposed benefit of 'preferred customers' is that buyers receive a preferential treatment regarding, product quality and availability, support, delivery and/or prices compared to other buyers from a supplier.[24] A supplier may dedicate its best personnel to joint new product development, customize its products according to the customer's wishes, offer innovations or even enter into an exclusivity agreement. The supplier might also ensure privileged treatment if bottlenecks occur due to constraints in production capacity". Furthermore, the title 'preferred customer' has a positive influence on supplier innovativeness and benevolent pricing.[25] To summarize it is assumed in literature and observed from empirical data that the concept of 'preferred customer' can lead to a preferential treatment received by a buying organisation.

2.1.2 The concept of 'preferred customer' explained through the social exchange theory

A theory that is used in the literature stream to explain the concept of 'preferred customer' is the social exchange theory. The social exchange theory is suited to describe relationships and the social exchange theory includes questions related to the initiation, continuation and termination of a relationship.[26] The social exchange theory is one of the most dominant models to understand workplace behaviour. [27] In addition, three steps are identified which are linked to the social exchange theory and the concept of 'preferred customer are; (1) expectations; (2) the comparison level and (3) the comparison of alternatives."[28] Expectations at the beginning phase of a

---

21 See Steinle and Schiele (2008), p. 1178
22 See Hätönen and Eriksson (2009), p. 143
23 See Steinle Schiele (2008), p. 6
24 See Nollet et al. (2012), p. 1187
25 See Schiele et al. (2011), "p. 3-5"
26 See Schiele et al. (2012), "p. 1180-1181"
27 See R. Cropanzano (2005), p. 874
28 See Schiele et al. (2012), p. 1180

relationship determine the level of attraction between a buyer and supplier, thus it is assumed that customer attractiveness is a condition for preferential customer treatment. Within a relationship an actor, an actor can be described as an individual who is involved in the relationship, uses relative and absolute criteria to evaluate the relationship, this statement is applicable to "the comparison level". After the "comparison level" which is linked to 'supplier satisfaction 'involved actors need to decide about the future of the relationship.[29] Hence supplier satisfaction is believed to be a driver of a preferred customer treatment. In the third phase 'comparison of alternatives' of the identified cycle of preferred customer a supplier assigns a preferred status to a buyer, regular status or decides to terminate the relationship.[30] In past research it is observed that suppliers do not treat all their customers equally, suppliers classify their customers according to different variables such as customer attractiveness, strategic importance, cost to serve and relationship value.[31]

2.2 Customer attractiveness as antecedent in order to become a preferred customer

As discussed at the begin of this master thesis the cycle of preferred customer consists of several antecedents and phases. It is assumed that the first antecedent in order to become a preferred customer is customer attractiveness.

2.2.1 Customer attractiveness as antecedent for preferred customer

According to the literature a special form of customer attractiveness is referred as 'preferred customer'. Attraction has been described in various ways over time in different streams of literature. Attraction can be defined as "(...)"the degree to which buyer and seller achieve – in their interaction with each other – a reward–cost outcome in excess of some minimum level."[32] In addition, the exchange of both tangible and intangible, resources and knowledge-based resources are essential for value co-creation and thus to enhancement of the relationship.[33] Additionally, attraction is considered as an antecedent for the development of trust and commitment in a relationship and influences the continuation of the relationship trough time.[34]According to the concept of 'preferred customers' are expected to gain competitive

---

[29] See Schiele et al. (2012), p. 1180
[30] See Hüttinger et al. (2012) p. 700
[31] See Nollet et al. (2012), pp. 1187
[32] See Hald (2012), p. 1231
[33] See Baxter (2012), p. 1251
[34] See Hovmøller Mortensen et al. (2008), p. 800

advantage, an advantage received due to preferential treatment from their supplier base.[35] Despite the introduction of 'preferred customer' the idea of customer attractiveness is poorly defined and remains vague to what extent customer attractiveness can be defined.[36] In short, in order to conduct this research a clarification of the concept of customer attractiveness is required.

2.2.2 Customer attractiveness determined by the supplier's expectations for future benefits

A clarification for customer attractiveness is the supplier's actors' expectations related to the benefits gained from the relationship with the customer, where the expectations of the actor are oriented towards the future.[37] From the perspective of 'social exchange theory', which is been widely used in marketing and relational literature, attractiveness is described from a value and reward viewpoint. Moreover, through the lens of 'social exchange theory' expected value, perceived trust and perceived dependency are essential dimensions for perceived customer attractiveness. Hence, customer attractiveness is determined by the actor's expected outcome of the relationship. [38] Due to the explanatory power of 'social exchange theory' the social exchange theory is a general theory used in research regarding customer attractiveness. [39]To conclude it can be stated that the foundation of 'social exchange theory' is useful to carry out this research since customer attractiveness and supplier satisfaction are interconnected into the cycle of preferred customer.

2.2.3 Operationalization of customer attractiveness between buyer and supplier

A clarification of customer attractiveness is required in order to understand the 'preferred customer' concept. In his research Harris et al. (2003) identified three main drivers for customer attractiveness namely; economic benefits, social compatibility and access to important resources-based drivers.[40] With the intention to quantify customer attractiveness Hüttinger et al. (2012) developed an initial overarching conceptual model for preferential treatment received from suppliers, the following antecedents for customer attractiveness were identified; market growth,

---

35 See Pulles et al. (2016), "p. 130-131"
36 See La Rocca et al. (2012), p. 1241
37 See Hald (2012), p. 1230
38 See Hovmøller Mortensen et al. (2008), p. 208
39 See Tóth et al. (2015), "p. 725-726"
40 See Harris et al. (2003), p. 13

risk, technological, economic and social factors.[41]A study conducted by La Rocca et al. (2012) identified four factors regarding customer attractiveness namely; development potential, intimacy, relational fit and profitability. A limitation of the concept of customer attractiveness is that the term is relative and supplier specific.[42] In a developed conceptual model Tanskanen and Aminoff (2015) described four categories of attractiveness in a strategic buyer-supplier relationship namely; economic, behavioural, resource- and bridging bases.[43] These findings are in alignment with previous research that proposed that attractiveness is a function of perceived expected value, perceived trust and perceived dependence.

To conclude it can be stated that the social exchange theory is a suitable theory to describe customer attractiveness. However, it has to be emphasized that customer attractiveness is relative and supplier specific. Additionally, actors within an organisation might perceive attractiveness different.

2.3 Supplier satisfaction the second antecedent in order to become a preferred customer

It is assumed that the second antecedent in order to become a preferred customer is supplier satisfaction.[44]

2.3.1 Satisfying suppliers in order to maintain access to capable suppliers from the buyers' perspective

Customer attractiveness and supplier satisfaction are closely related, supplier satisfaction and customer attractiveness are closely related due to "(..) suppliers enter into a relationship with a certain expectation, this expectation determines the level of satisfaction when both parties interact"[45]. Where customer attractiveness focuses on expected value of a future relationship, supplier satisfaction is determined by perceived value in a current relationship.[46] To gain and maintain access to capable suppliers and their capabilities in the current environment, supplier

---

41 See Hüttinger et al. (2012), p. 1203
42 See La Rocca et al. (2012), p. 1245
43 See Tanskanen and Aminoff (2015), p. 128
44 See Pulles et al. (2016), p. 133
45 See Hüttinger et al. (2012), p. 1202
46 See Pulles et al.(2016), p.132

satisfaction is essential.[47] Developments in the market has led to a reduction of the supply base and outsourced production activities, which makes a buying company more dependent on their supplier than in the past, and thus supplier satisfaction gained importance. Hence, supplier satisfaction is perceived as the current value of the relationship and influences accessibility of resources from the supply base. In an empirical research among 91 suppliers Pulles et al. (2016) measured the influence of customer attractiveness and supplier satisfaction on preferred customers. Supplier satisfactions points out to be a significant mediator between customer attractiveness and a preferential treatment given by the supplier. From a buyer's perspective, when actors fail to develop a certain level of equity or fulfilment in the supplier's experience, buyers might fail to achieve preferred customer status.[48] As described in the framework of the cycle of preferred customer actors should decide about the continuation of the relationship.[49] Thus, supplier satisfaction influences the decision for a supplier's perspective to terminate or continue the relationship.

2.3.2 Supplier satisfaction is established when the supplier's expectations are fulfilled

To clarify, supplier satisfaction is defined as "(..)the buyer's ability to live up the expectations of the supplier."[50] The moment when supplier satisfaction is established is determined when the expectation of the supplier is fulfilled. A major influence on the level of satisfaction is the relationship between buyer and supplier. Generally, satisfaction can be described as the experienced sense of pleasure versus displeasure.[51] It is assumed that dissatisfaction could lead to a change in the relationship. Evaluation of a supplier and determination of factors that affect supplier satisfaction, could lead to a change in relationship management towards the supplier. Satisfaction is a response of an actor to the difference between what the actor expects and what he receives, this can also be described as an actor's cognitive and affective evaluation based upon experiences within the relationship.[52] Expected value can be described as the perceived trade-off between the future advantages and disadvantages of an interaction within a

---

47 See Vos et al. (2016), p. 4613
[48] See Pulles et al.(2016), "p. 131-137"
[49] See Schiele et al.(2012), p. 1181
[50] See Schiele et al.(2012), p. 1181
[51] See Wong, (2000), p. 428
[52] See Jonsson and Zineldin (2003), p. "224-225"

relationship.[53] A buyer-supplier relationship is evaluated by comparing the expectations against the actual performance of an relationship, this includes as well absolute as relative criteria, e.g. the costs and rewards for the buyer and supplier.[54] The social exchange theory is a widely used theory to describe organisational behaviour. It can be assumed that the evaluation of the perceived trade-offs between advantages and disadvantages determines when a party is satisfied.

2.3.3 A review of the operationalization of supplier satisfaction

One of the first authors that named and emphasized the term supplier satisfaction is Wong in 2000. He stated that co-operative culture, commitment to supplier satisfaction and constructive controversy are factors leading to supplier satisfaction and eventually to customer satisfaction. Furthermore, he emphasized that supplier satisfaction is assumed to play a role for organisation which desire to achieve business excellence through customer satisfaction.[55]

In 2003 Maunu conducted an extensive research regarding possible antecedents of supplier satisfaction. She identified two different categories of supplier satisfaction namely 'business related dimensions' and 'communication related dimensions', in total 9 dimensions were identified. Dimensions which belong to the business-related category are; profitability, agreements, early supplier involvement, business continuity and forecast planning. The second category which refer to communication aspects include; roles and responsibilities, openness and trust, feedback and the company values. These antecedents were however not empirically tested by. Additionally, money, time, long-term-relationship, communication, quality, trust, commitment, innovation and flexibility were recognized from existing literature as elements of supplier satisfaction.[56]

In an explorative study Essig and Amann (2009) proposed a supplier satisfaction index. Data was gathered from 491 suppliers with a return rate of 30% and the questionnaire consists of 36 closed questions related supplier satisfaction. The proposed supplier satisfaction index includes several levels such as a 'strategic level' 'operative level' and 'accompanying level'. Each level consists of one or multiple (sub)factors the strategic level contains of 'intensity of cooperation'. Secondly the operative level consists of 'billing/delivery' and 'order' as subordinate groups. The

---

[53] See (Hald et al. (2009), p. 963
[54] See Schiele et al. (2012), p. 1181
[55] See Wong (2000), p. 430
[56] See Maunu(2003), "p. 91-97"

accompanying level includes factors as 'communication', 'conflict management', and 'general' view.[57]

In comparison to customer attractiveness, supplier satisfaction mainly refers to the operationalization of how buyer and supplier should organise activities once interaction has started.[58] Hüttinger et al. (2014) derived several categories as antecedents, by using a world café method, for customer attractiveness, supplier satisfaction and preferred customer status. Once they had gathered all data, they used an inductive coding approach to categorize all required data. The identified categories are; growth opportunity, innovation potential, operative excellence, reliability, support of suppliers, supplier involvement, contact accessibility and relational behaviour. Additionally, they empirically tested these categories and results indicate that growth opportunity, reliability and relational behaviour have a significant impact on supplier satisfaction, where innovation potential, operative excellence, support, supplier involvement and contact accessibility do not indicate a significant impact on supplier satisfaction. Even though, that the results regarding relational behaviour are in line with other studies regarding supplier satisfaction. A limitation of the research is that the antecedents of supplier satisfaction might be industry-specific.[59] Drivers that influence customer attractiveness before and during a relationship, and thus influence supplier satisfaction, are related to economic, technological and social factors.[60]

A replica study by Vos et al. (2016), expanded Hüttinger et al. (2014) their original model, by making a distinction between direct and indirect procurement, and by adding profitability as an antecedent for supplier satisfaction. Regardless of direct or indirect procurement the results indicate that relational factors, such as reliability and operative excellence, are perceived to influence supplier satisfaction similar or even have more influence as economic factors like profitability and growth opportunity. This finding suggests "(...)that even when a buyer is considered not to have a great economic value, the buyer still might receive a preferential treatment due to relational factors"[61].

---

[57] See Essig and Amann (2009), "p. 105-108"
[58] See Hüttinger et al. (2012), "p. 1203-1204"
[59] See Hüttinger et al. (2014), "p.711-713"
[60] See Hüttinger et al. (2012), p. 1202
[61] See Vos et al. (2016), p. 4621

The definitions of constructs for supplier satisfaction identified by Hüttinger et al. (2014) and the antecedent, profitability, introduced by Vos et al. (2016) are used in the interview guide, which will be discussed in the research methodology chapter. Since they are one of the first authors that observed that significant key antecedent exists regarding supplier satisfaction. Added by 'flexibility' as construct which is part of relational behaviour. Buyers should strive for flexibility, solidarity and mutuality in order to gain a preferential treatment.[62] It has to be pointed out that for this research only flexibility as part of relational behaviour is measured. An overview of the definitions used definitions for this study are presented in table 1.

Antecedents	Description	Reference
Growth opportunity	The ability to grow together and to generate new opportunities through the relationship	Hüttinger et al. (2014
Innovation capabilities	The supplier's possibility to generate innovations within the relationship due to the buyer's capabilities and contribution to the joint innovation process	Hüttinger et al. (2014)
Operative excellence	The supplier's perception that the operations within the relationship are managed in an efficient way	Hüttinger et al. (2014)
Reliability	"(…) Perception that the other party acts in a consistent as well as a reliable manner and fulfil its agreements"	Hüttinger et al. (2014)
Support of suppliers	The effort and assistance of buyers to increase the performance of a supplier within a relationship	Hüttinger et al. (2014)
Supplier involvement	The degree to which a supplier participates directly in the product development of a customer. Furthermore, a contact which develops and advances exchanges process, in order to develop structural bonds	Hüttinger et al. (2014)
Profitability	Margins achieved and a positive influence of the profitability on our firm.	Vos et al. (2016)
Relational behaviour	"(…) 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."	Hüttinger et al. (2014)
Flexibility	The level of how one party their attitude is towards special requests	Griffith, Harvey, and Lusch (2006)

---

[62] See Hüttinger et al. (2012), p. 712

	relating to, delivery times, handling of products, etc.	

Table 1: Operationalization of supplier *satisfaction*

To conclude the significance of supplier satisfaction has to be acknowledged, since supplier satisfaction influences the future of a relationship with a supplier.

2.4 The same social stimuli perceived differently

Actors from both the buyer and supplier perspective can have different perceptions about certain aspects related to the concept of supplier satisfaction.

2.4.1 Perception can be regarded as a form of categorisation

From a social perceptual theory perspective an actor experiences other individuals and events phenomenologically, this implies that actors perceive and experience, objects and events as the foundation for the investigation of reality. Perceptual distance or difference is defined as "(…) the variance in the perceptions of the same social stimulus". High perceptual differences refer to the situation where a large variation in perception occurs between individuals or teams, where low perceptual differences imply the opposite. Furthermore, perception functions as a form of categorization. Since the perceived categories prove guide lines for processing information, perception can be considered as a form of a problem-solving technique.[63] In the process of perception processes the role of sense making plays a central role, since it involves how an actor gives purpose to an experience.[64] Furthermore, individuals themselves can give meaning to an observed phenomenon rather than this correspond with objective reality. Social perception can be reflected through the lens of observed social cues, includes personality traits and social skills.[65] From the process of how perceptions are formed, it can be stated that each individual can observe the same object differently, in addition perception can be considered as a method to categorize experiences.

2.4.2 Individual differences determine how actors interpret and perceive the world

It is important to point out that actors often have different perceptions about the same social stimulus, due to differences in personality, experience, interpersonal skills, empathic ability,

---

[63] See Cristiana B et al. (2001), p. 256-260
[64] See Hasson et al. (2016), p. 296
[65] See Kong, (2015), "p. 195-196"

dispositions and cognitive complexity.[66] Additionally, there is the possibility that temporarily motivational factors influence perceptions regarding the immediate context. Differences in perceptions can arise from various different identified social styles, perception variables included in his research are 1) versatility 2) trust 3) credibility 4) power 5) attraction and 6) similarity. Social style refers to observable patterns of interpersonal communication behaviour with others in a relationship can perceive in order to describe a person. Accordingly, communication behaviour as part of our social style, significantly determines a number of perceptions, and thus influences the nature of the buyer-supplier relationship.[67] The perceptual process is influenced by individual differences such as; experience, personality and cognitive complexity. These factors determine how people perceive and interpret the world from a social perceptual theory perspective, actors experience events and other actors phenomenologically, due to the complexity of social stimuli and limitations in the information processing capabilities. Hence, the perceptual process is influenced by many individual differences, according to the social perceptual theory, these individual differences determine how actors perceive and interpret the world. Since actors within a team or organisation most likely vary in experience, personality, skills and values are assumed to perceive objects differently. In addition, 'collective cognition' is a term that refers to that a team possess cognitive properties that are distinct from the combination of the cognition of individual members.[68]

It can be concluded that actors perceive the same phenomenon in a working environment different or similar, mainly due to individual characteristics such as personality, past experience and skills.

2.5 The influence of being part of a group

From individual level it is observed that there is a probability that actors observe the same stimuli differently or similarly. However, a working environment is shaped by several factors, including the perceptions of each individual, therefore this section describes how being part of a group influences the individual.

---

[66] See Cristiana B et al. (2001), "p. 256-260"
[67] See Snavely (1981), "p.132-135"
[68] See Gibson et al. (2009), p. 63

2.5.1 Social Identity theory as an explanation for group behaviour

Social identity theory (SIT) was developed in order to explain bias, discrimination and intergroup conflict without the implications of personality or individual differences and without reducing large shared phenomena among individuals.[69] Additionally, the combination of social identity theory and self-categorisation theory (SCT) can provide a theoretical basis for organisational identification and for the explanation of work-related attitudes and behaviours. According to SCT, SCT refers to the categorisation process which is essential in SIT, there are three levels of self-categorisation namely 1) human identity 2) social identity) and 3) personal identity.[70] The main three assumption of the 'SIT' are: 1) Individuals aim for the development or an improvement of positive self-esteem 2) The individuals social identity is based on the individual's group membership, as part of the person's self-concept 3) In order to maintain a positive social identity, the individual aims for positive differentiation between the individual's ingroup and relevant outgroups.[71] Furthermore, SIT consists of several conceptual components which serve different explanatory functions of group memberships. Within 'SIT' a social identity is an individual's knowledge that he or she belongs to a group, which is referred as a social category. A social category is described as 'as social category is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category'. The establishment of a social category involves two main processes, namely self-categorization and social comparison. Firstly, self-categorisation refers to the process of an individual perceiving similarities and differences between group members and persons outside the group.[72] When someone categorizes another individual into a group, this process is called stereotyping "(…) you view them as being similar to one another and all having outgroup attributes." Secondly, social comparison refers to the process where a person compares themselves with group members, persons in other groups, and the comparison of their own group with other groups.[73]

---

[69] See Hogg, et al. (2004), p. 248
[70] See Hornsey (2008), p. 208
[71] See Van Dick et al.(2005), p. 191
[72] See Stets and Burke (2000), p. 225
[73] See Hogg(2000), p. 401

2.5.2 The group 'norm' and the actor's attitude and behaviour are determined by the social category

SIT processes are driven by two motivations namely, self-enhancement and uncertainty reduction. An assumption of intergroup social comparison idea is that groups strive to be better than another group. Individuals believe that belonging to a 'better' group has positive effect on self-esteem. Regarding intergroup relations, SIT, explains why groups compete with each other. The other motive is to reduce uncertainty, social categorization serves as a function to reduce uncertainty. Additionally, the self-categorisation process and depersonalisation process explains how individuals follow group-norms. Since a social category can be considered as a cognitive representation of group norms, where norms are determined and bounded by group memberships, and describe behaviour that defines group membership.[74] Norms are described as "(…), norms are the source of social influence in groups because they are prescriptive, not merely descriptive. The self-categorization and depersonalization process explain how people conform to or enact group norms."[75] Conformity is the process in which an individual transforms its behaviour to the appropriate prescribed behaviour of the group. Once the norm has been established or recognised by a social category, the norm serves two functions. The first function is to emphasize ingroup similarities and ingroup identity. Secondly, to differentiate the group from other groups.[76] Additionally, depersonalisation refers to "(…) the change in self-conceptualisation and the basis of perception of others, it does not have the negative connotations of such terms as deindividuation or dehumanisation."[77] The different dimensions of social-identity can be summarized into four dimensions namely 1) cognitive dimensions, awareness of being a member of a group2) affective, the emotional attachment to the group 3) evaluative dimension, the association assigned of belonging to that group from the outside and 4) behavioural dimensions, a representation of the behavioural aspects of identifications. Finally, the main implication of 'SIT' for organisational contexts is that the more an individual self-categorise in terms of membership in an organisational group, such as team, organisation or occupation, the more the attitudes and behaviours are influenced by the group membership.[78]

---

[74] See Hogg et al. (2004), p. 257
[75] See (Hogg et al., 2004), p. 259
[76] See Hogg et al. (2004), p. 259
[77] See Hogg and Terry (2000), p. 123
[78] See Van Dick et al. (2005), "p. 192-193"

2.5.2 Self-categorization within organisations to differentiate different groups

Approximately 10 years after the introduction of SIT, another theory named self-categorisation theory was introduced as an expansion of 'SIT', therefore it has to be emphasized that self-categorisation incorporates 'SIT'. Firstly, self-categorization theory is a theory that elaborates the operation of social-categorisation process as a cognitive fundament for group behaviour. Social categorization can be described as the process where an individual categorises it 'self' and 'others' into ingroups and outgroups. The emphasis is on the perceived similarities of the target to relevant ingroup or outgroup prototype. The term prototype is defined as "cognitive representation of features that describe and prescribe attributes of the group". Targets can be described that individuals are no longer personified as unique individuals but rather as a personification of the relevant prototype. It is assumed that self-categorisation produces normative behaviour, positive ingroup attitudes and cohesion, collective behaviour, shared norms, mutual influence, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, emotional contagion and empathy.[79] Organisations, units or divisions within an organisation and professions or sociodemographic categories that are distributed across organisation can be regarded as a ' social category'.[80] In addition, SIT is a general approach to the analysis of group membership and group phenomena. Furthermore, the self-categorisation process of being a member of an organisation, determines why an individual perceives successes and failures of the organisation as their own, therefore the individuals aims for a positive outcome for the organisation.[81] Additionally, the cognitive aspect of the individual is critical in differentiating. Based upon the self-categorisation theory, individuals can identify themselves on personal level and social level into different categories within an organisation namely 1) personal level (own career) and 2) with different subunits with their organisation such as, work groups, departments, business units and occupational group., referred as foci.[82]

---

[79] See Hogg and Terry (2000), p. 123
[80] See Hogg and Terry (2000), p. 122
[81] See Hogg et al. (2004), p. 16
[82] See Van Dick et al. (2005), p. 192

2.5.3 Social identification in organisational contexts as an explanation for the actor's evaluation of satisfaction

Based upon 'SCT' and 'SIT' a new concept is introduced in the stream of literature namely 'social identification in organisational contexts'. The introduced concept of 'social identification in organisational contexts' is based upon three assumptions namely 1) Social identification within organisation settings is a versatile concept including different dimensions and foci (targets) 2) Higher levels of identification are related to positive organisational outcomes 3) The concept of social identification is flexible and connected to the situational context. An overview of the identified dimensions and foci based upon 'SIT' and 'self-categorisation theory' derived for social identification is represented in table 2.

Foci / targets					
		Personal Identity	**Social Identity**		
Dimensions	**Cognitive: actor's awareness of being a group member**	Career	Team	Organisation	Occupation
	Evaluative: association assigned of belonging to that group from the outside				
	Affective: emotional attachment to the group				
	Behavioural: representation of the behavioural aspects of the group				

Table 2: Social identification in organizational settings source Van Dick et al., (2005)

Cognitive, evulative, affective and behavioral are dimensions that are extracted from 'SIT'. Additionally, from a 'SCT' perspective a distinguistion is required regarding on which level an individual can identify himself. As mentioned earlier an individual can identify himself on personal and social level which are relevant for organisational settings.[83] Furthermore, earlier studies indicate that identification influences work-related attitudes and behaviour. Especially the 'cognitive' dimensions are relevant for this master thesis, since the cognitive dimension is related to the perception of the individual belonging to a group. The 'cognitive' dimensions refer to the actor's awareness and knowledge of belonging to a certain group.[84] Perception and cognition are terms which are related to each other. Our decisions, beliefs and actions are guided by perception. Furthermore, cognition influences how we perceive and interpret the world.[85] As described earlier the general concept of 'satisfaction' can be described as an actor's cognitive and affective evaluation based upon experiences within the relationship.[86] Identification with different foci are sources for conflict, due to that an actor identifies himself strongly with his team but not as much with his organisation as whole, in that case the norms from the team which contradict the norms of the organisation will be assumed to be followed.[87] Therefore it as assumed that when an actor is ''satisfied' is influenced by the 'cognitive' dimensions, since norms are established through the 'social identity'. From a theoretical foundation the concept of 'social identification in organisation contexts' provides a theoretical explanation for differences within a buyer-supplier relationship on several levels.

2.6 Conflicts created through a different perception

In the previous section we introduced theories to explain the perceptions of individuals and organisations/teams. In this chapter as a consequence of perceptual distance between or within organisations the possible consequences are reviewed.

2.6.1 Conflict as a consequence of perceptual distance

In the current organisational environment, it is assumed that most organisations require interdependence among team members. As a consequence of the required interdependency

---

[83] See Van Dick et al.(2005), "p. 192-193"
[84] See Van Dick et al. (2005), p. 192
[85] See Tacca (2011), p. 1
[86] See Jonsson and Zineldin (2003) , "p. 224-225"
[87] See Van Dick(2001), p. 271

among team members or departments the importance of cooperation has increased. Simultaneously the risk of a conflict between actors has increased or is even inevitable, due to different interests of actors within the working environment.[88] A conflict appears when actors perceive or experience incompatibilities or threats to their goals, values, interests or beliefs. Past research proposed that there are several kinds of conflicts that can occur within relationships. Throughout the literature stream regarding conflict management two main dimensions of conflicts have been identified namely cognitive and affective conflicts. These dimensions refer to conflicts that either occur due to disagreements relating to tasks or conflicts related to interpersonal or emotional issues. [89] As a consequence of perceptual distance within or organisations or between organisations it is possible that conflicts occur.[90] Additionally, it is stated that conflict in top management is unavoidable, this due to that different positions perceive the environment differently.[91] The way of how conflicts are managed determines how the conflict affects the relationship.[92]

2.6.2 Conflict as a tool for organisational learning

To begin with several studies identified the positive consequence of conflict. It is assumed that there is a possibility that organisations stagnate, when there no or little conflicts occur. Therefore, there consists a shared belief among researchers that a moderate amount of conflict is necessary in order to realize organisational effectiveness. As mentioned earlier there are two different types of conflict identified namely conflicts related to tasks or emotional issues. It is assumed that organisations can benefit from task conflicts, since task conflicts often involves an extensive debate which leads to improved decision-making and performance.[93] It is proposed that teams or organisations can benefit from cognitive conflicts due to debate and discussions, thus implies promotion of better decision making.[94] Furthermore, previous studies have recognized task conflicts as an event that stimulates innovation, efficiency and discourage self-satisfaction of members.[95] In addition, teams should encourage cognitive conflicts and

---

[88] See Yang(2015), p. 282
[89] See Rahim (2002), "p. 210-211"
[90] See Yang(2015), p. 282
[91] See Amason (1996), p. 127
[92] See Yang and Li (2018), p. 107
[93] See Rahim (2002), "p. 211-212"
[94] See Yang (2015), p. 283
[95] See Chang andGotcher (2010), "p. 287-288"

discourage affective conflicts, this with the intention to reach higher levels of perceptual agreement and affective acceptance.[96]

2.7 A brief summary of the reviewed literature

As quite some literature has been reviewed in the second section of this study, a brief summary of key concepts and theory appears to be suitable are listed in table three.

Constructs	Description	Reference
Customer attractiveness	Customer attractiveness as the supplier's actors' expectations related to the benefits gained from the relationship with the customer, the expectations of the actor are oriented towards the future	Hald (2012)
Supplier satisfaction	The buyer's ability to live up the expectations of the supplier, and results in a positive affective state	Schiele et al. (2012)
Preferred customer status	Preferred customer status is a relative status when, a firm has preferred customer status with a supplier, if the supplier offers the buyer preferential resource allocation	Steinle and Schiele (2008)
Social perceptual theory	Actors experience events and other actors phenomenologically, due to the complexity of social stimuli and limitations in the information processing capabilities. The perceptual process is influenced by many individual differences, according to the social perceptual theory.	Gibson et al. (2009)
Perceptual distance	"(…) The variance in the perceptions of the same social stimulus". High perceptual differences refer to the situation where a large variation in perception occurs between individuals or teams, where low perceptual differences imply the opposite"	(Cristiana B, Gibson; Jay, Conger; Cecily, 2001)
Social identification theory	"(…)That part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his or her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership"	Van Dick et al. (2005)

---

[96] See Amason (1996), p. 143

Self-categorisation theory	"(…) SCT theorists assume that individuals can categorize themselves at three levels of abstraction: (a) on a subordinate level as individual people (who compare themselves with other individuals), (b) on an intermediate level as members of a certain group (that is then compared with relevant outgroups), or (c) on a superordinate level as human beings."	Hornsey (2008)
Social identification in organisations	A framework based upon SIT and SCT. "(…) (a) social identification in organisational contexts is a multifaceted concept consisting of different dimensions and foci (or targets), (b) higher levels of identification are related to higher productivity and more positive work-related attitudes, and (c) identification is a very flexible concept that is linked to the situational context"	Van Dick et al. (2005)
Conflict	A conflict appears when actors perceive or experience incompatibilities or threats to their goals, values, interests or beliefs	Rahim (2002)

Table 3: An overview of the reviewed literature

2.8 Explanation and justification of research model

With the stated research question and purpose of this master thesis in mind relevant theories and observations have been reviewed in this section. Since the stated research question as mentioned at the beginning of this report: *the description and explanation of (potential) perception differences regarding supplier satisfaction within a buyer-supplier relationship'*. The identified key antecedents by Hüttinger et al. (2014) are used for the interview guide and research model, the research model is presented in figure 1. The selected antecedents were determined in consultation with the external supervisor at the case company. It was decided that 'supplier involvement' should be excluded, due to that the case company outsourced their products about 2,5 years ago. Therefore, the external supervisor perceived that 'supplier involvement' was not relevant yet at the moment of the research. Furthermore, 'flexibility' as part of relational behaviour was included, due to that the external supervisor perceived that the suppliers of the case company were not satisfied about Alpha their 'flexibility'. The reason why the antecedents of Hüttinger et al. (2014) were used is that they were one of the first authors that observed that

key antecedents for supplier satisfaction exist. Furthermore, the tools developed by (Maunu, 2003) and (Essig & Amann, 2009) were not empirically tested in later studies. The 'social perceptual theory' emphasized that there is the (possibility) that each individual perceives observations differently. Therefore, an explanation of the 'cognition process' of individuals within an organisation is required. Due to that 'social identification in organisational contexts' influences individuals on several dimensions which is described in 2.5, including cognition and work-related behaviour and attitudes. The concept of 'social identification in organisation contexts' is used to determine why actors within a buyer-supplier relationship perceive the antecedents of supplier satisfaction differently or similarly. According to 'social identification in organisations' the cognition of an individual depends upon if the individuals identifies itself on; team; organisation or occupational level. Furthermore, it is assumed that self-categorisation, and thus identification in organisational settings, produces normative behaviour, positive ingroup attitudes and cohesion, collective behaviour, shared norms, mutual influence.[97]

---

[97] See Hogg and Terry (2000), p.123
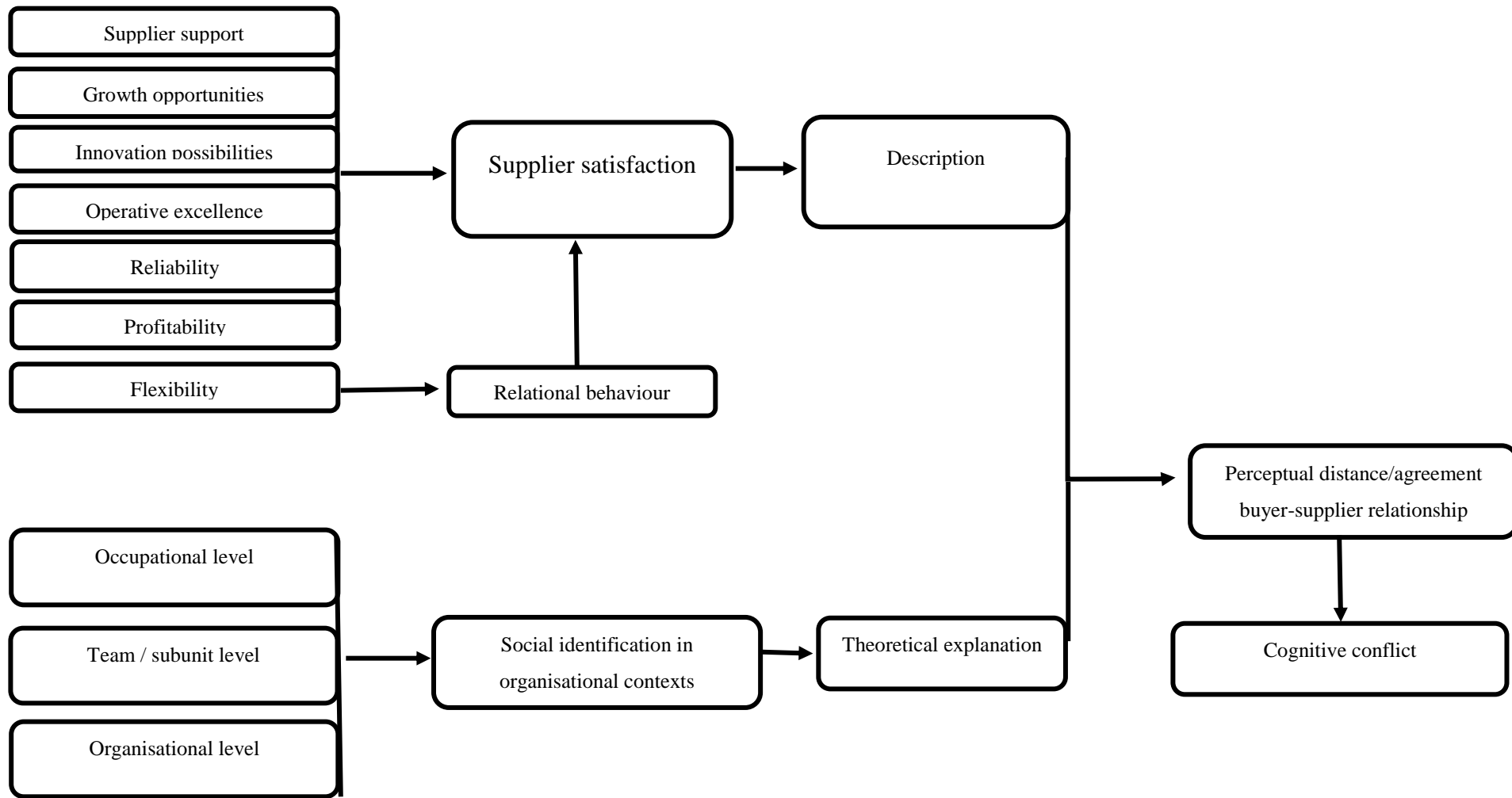
Figure 1 Research model: description and explanation of perceptual distance/similarities buyer-supplier relationship regarding supplier satisfaction

With this in mind the individual can identify himself regarding the antecedents of supplier satisfaction on team; organisation or occupational level and therefore be satisfied or dissatisfied. For example, two individuals belonging to the same organisation 'social identity', both individuals identify themselves into a different occupation, sales versus purchasing, might differ regarding cognitive, evaluative, affective and behavioural dimensions. Due to that the identification for the one individual with his 'occupation' is stronger than his identification with the 'organisation' or 'subunit'. However, it has to be emphasized that identification is a flexible concept which is connected to situational context. Finally, as part of a determination if 'perceptual distance' occurred within the relationship, the concept of 'conflict' is included in the research model, due to that 'conflict' might be an indication of occurred perceptual distance in the past

3. Research Methodology

This section of the master thesis will describe and explain how required data is gathered and analysed.

3.1. Data Collection through semi-structured interviews

The goal of this study is to describe and explain how 'supplier satisfaction' is perceived from a dyadic perspective. A semi-structured interview instrument is used in order to collect data. A semi-structured interview as instrument is suitable to explore different attitudes, value, beliefs and motives. A qualitative semi-structured interview method to collect data allows to emerge new viewpoints freely.[98] For both the supplier and buyer's perspective an interview guide was developed and divided in three segments as proposed in the literature stream of how to develop a semi-structured interview guide.[99] At the beginning of the interview the purpose was to gain a better understanding of the participants role and his opinion about supplier satisfaction. Afterwards, the intention was to gather data about how the participant perceives the buyer-supplier relationship with their peer on the other side. Participants from both perspectives were asked how satisfied the participants were with the determined antecedents of supplier satisfaction, as explained in 2.6. Participants were asked to rate the selected antecedents from 1 to 10, where a 1 indicates very dissatisfied and 10 very satisfied. The closed questions in combination with the open-questions were helpful in comparing and analysing the different perceptions. In the third part of the interview the participants were asked questions about their opinion on perceptual agreement within the organisation at which the participants were employed and occurred conflicts within the relationship. Finally, participants could give additional information about the already discussed topics in the closing segment of the interview.

An overview of the developed interview guide can be found in appendix A. The collected data was analysed through a thematic framework approach. The researcher can include the following types of data in a framework approach; direct quotes, summaries, paraphrases or abstracts, researchers' explanations, ratings or summarized judgement and combination of these types of data.[100] How the 'framework approach' is carried out in order to analyse and interpret data is

---

[98] See Aira et al. (2003), p. 271
[99] See Gale et al. (2013)
[100] See Miles et al. (2014), p. 116

described in 3.4. As described earlier, participants were asked to grade certain statements. Therefore, the analysed matrixes include both codes and grades generated from the analysed data.

To start with, the relevant employees from both the buyer's and supplier's perspective were on beforehand selected by the external supervisor Before interviews took place the main contact persons at the suppliers' and buyers' perspective were informed by the case company, namely Alpha . In this e-mail both perspectives were informed about the background and scope of the research, at this stage (possible) participants weren't approached yet by the researcher. In the first week of June, actors from the buyer's perspective were personally invited by the research to participate in this research, once again participants were informed about the background, goal and procedures of the interview. After the participants were invited, interviews at the buyer's perspective took place in a timeframe of two weeks. From the buyer's perspective in total five participants were interviewed divided among five different business units. In the meanwhile, actors from the supplier's side were invited by the researcher and interviews were scheduled in a timeframe of four weeks. Afterwards, in total six, different key suppliers were interviewed during this research. The mean duration of the interview was 35 minutes. Interviews took place in two languages, namely Dutch and English, therefore this master thesis has a cross-case language setting.

As soon as interviews were conducted a verbatim transcription of the interviews were sent to the participants for validation. After all interviews were conducted and transcribed, gathered data was analysed as discussed later on in paragraph 3.4. In total 19 persons were interviewed during this research. Additionally, after all the suppliers were interview four more questions were asked to participants from the buyer's perceptive. These questions were added later to the interview guide and the purpose of these questions was to compare results and validate gathered information. All information that is gathered and analysed from participants from the buyer and supplier perspective, are transcoded into anonymous transcriptions, this due to confidentiality and a non-disclosure agreement of sensitive information. With semi-structured interviews as an instrument to collect data it was desired to reduce social desired answers. Social desired answers are described as "(…) respondents answer in what they believe is the, preferred social response

whether it is true or not." [101] At the beginning of each conducted interview, the interviewer mentioned that there were no good or bad answers, this was emphasized in the introduction with the intention to reduce social desired answers.

The selection of participants can be explained as purposive sampling, the purpose of purposive sampling is to select participants which are relevant to answer the stated research question. Due to that this form of sampling is a non-probability form, results are not generalizable to a wider population.[102] Participants were selected in compliance with Alpha and the selected suppliers. For example, the suppliers Lima and India appointed employees to participate in the study, therefore the number of possible interviews were limited on these cases. Due to geographical constraints, interviews were conducted by skype and telephone for the supplier's perspective and for the buyer's perspective interviews were conducted face-to-face

3.2 Case study as the selected research design

The used research design in this study can be regarded as a multiple case study. A case study is a broad term and it describes a 'social phenomenon'. Within a case study it is possible that several data sources are used such as interviews and observational data. Furthermore, a case study may involve solely one actor such as an organisation or one person or it involves several actors. A case study is suitable to apply when a broad research question is stated. In addition, a case study is suitable when its desired to gain insights into perceived experiences of actors involved in the social phenomenon. A brief description of a case study is 'the study within the unit of observation in-depth."[103] A case study is a type of research that contributes to the exploration of a phenomenon within its context. Furthermore, a case study is appropriate when the goal is to answer a 'how' question. Within this master thesis the goal is to describe and explain 'how' the buyer's and supplier's perspective perceive supplier satisfaction similarly or differently.[104] A case study should not be solely regarded as a preliminary stage of theory development. Since the gathered and analysed data contribute to an extension or refutation of existing concepts.[105] Since this research involves different autonomously operating business unit and different suppliers,

---

[101] See Barriball and While, (1994), p. 331
[102] See Bryman and Bell (2015), p.
[103] See Swanborn (2010), "p. 12-14"
[104] See Baxter and Jack (2008), "p. 544-545"
[105] See Stuart et al. (2002), "p.421-422"

which will be explained in the case-description 3.2.1 of this research, the design of the case study can be regarded as a multiple case study. A method to analyse a multiple case study is to use within- and cross-case analysis, this is useful in examining similarities and differences between the observed units.[106]

3.2.1 Five autonomous business units from the buyer's perspective and the shared relationship with the same supply-base

The research was conducted at Alpha which is a company that provides technical solutions for different markets. Data was gathered from in total five different business units and Alpha their key suppliers. It has to be emphasized that each business unit operates autonomously. The business units that participated in this research are: Beta, Charlie, Delta, Echo and Foxtrot. Alpha has a consolidated turnover between 150 and 200 million euro's and has approximately 750 employees worldwide. The supply base from Alpha consists of both domestic and international suppliers. In the past Alpha produced their own productions, however Alpha decided a few years ago to outsource their production activities. The relationships between the business units from Alpha and the selected supplier is represented in figure 2. As presented each supplier serves multiple business units.

---

[106] See Baxter and Jack (2008), p. 550
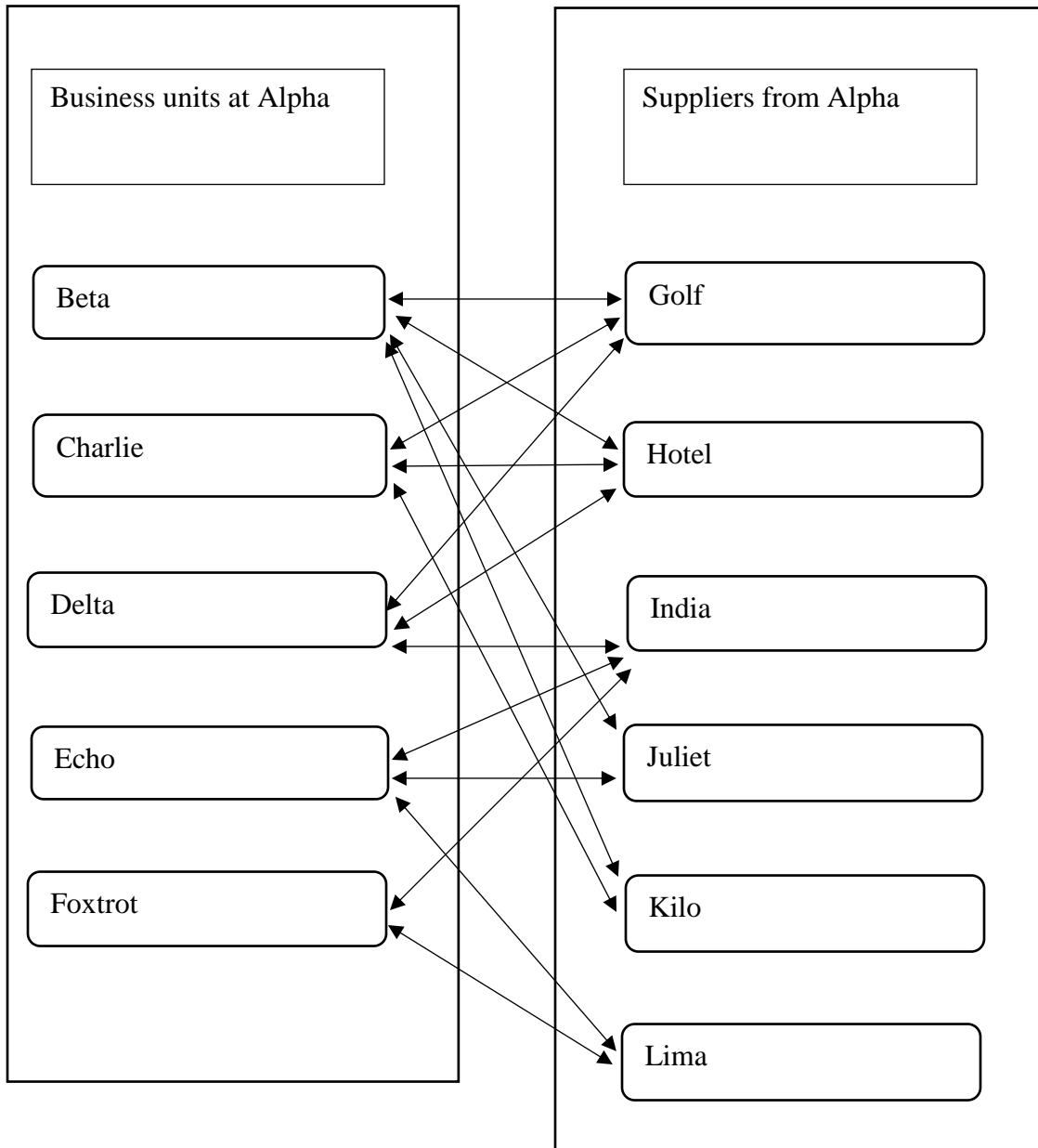
Figure 2 An overview of the relationships between the business units and suppliers

To clarify figure 2 the business unit Beta is involved in a buyer-supplier relationship with Golf, Hotel, Juliet and Kilo.

3.3 Reliability and validity of the conducted research

A threat to the validity of this kind of research is the use of leading questions or the research's prior knowledge about the subjects influencing what is worth discussing or not. Moreover, by letting the respondent review the transcription, the respondent co-creates the data, and thus

40

increases validity.[107] Since semi-structured interviews consists of questions determined on beforehand and questions which can arise during the interview, it is advised to tape-record these interviews for later analysis.[108] In order to improve validity of the research the conducted interviews were audiotaped. A tool to improve the reliability of the semi-structured interviews is to use probing, probing allows the interviewer for clarification of relevant answers given by the respondent.[109] As in quantitative research reliability refers to replicability of the conducted research and the results. In comparison with quantitative research, reliability in qualitative research refers to consistency.[110] To increase consistency an interview guide was developed, and definitions for the selected constructs in the research model were defined on beforehand.

A limitation of a qualitative research is that such kind of research is hard to replicate, generalize, subjectivity and lack of transparency.[111] Furthermore, the native language has to be considered while interviewing respondents, while interviewing a respondent who communicates in the context of another language can threaten the accuracy of interpretation. Due to misunderstandings which might occur as a consequence of language barriers. Especially the use of technical terms related to a certain subject are sensitive for misunderstandings as a consequence of language barriers.[112] In order to reduce misunderstanding due to language barriers, all used constructs of supplier satisfaction used in the interview guide were defined as illustrated in table 1. Considering the cross-language setting of the research, for each respondent it is noted if the interview was conducted in the respondent's native language or not, which is presented table 4.

Company	Respondent's role	Language interview	Native language respondent
India	Sales manager	Dutch	Dutch
Juliet	New business development / sales manager	English	English
Juliet	Operations manager	English	Japanese
Juliet	Managing director	English	Japanese
Hotel	Director business unit	English	German
Hotel	Deputy director business unit	English	German

---

[107] See Newton(2010), p. 4
[108] See Cohen and Crabtree (2006)
[109] See Barriball and While(1994), "p. 330-332"
[110] See (Leung, 2015), p.322
[111] See Bryman and Bell (2015), p. 579
[112] See Marshall and While (1994), p. 568

Hotel	Account manager	English	Hungarian
Hotel	Material program manager	English	German
Hotel	Account team leader	English	Unknown
Lima	General manager	English	German
Lima	Account manager	English	Dutch
Golf	Chief Commercial Officer	Dutch	Dutch
Golf	Operations manager	Dutch	Dutch
Business unit – Alpha	**Respondent's role**	**Language interview**	**Native language respondent**
Beta	Operations manager	Dutch	Dutch
Charlie	Operations manager	Dutch	Dutch
Delta	Operations manager	Dutch	Dutch
Echo	Operations manager	Dutch	Dutch
Foxtrot	Operations manager	Dutch	Dutch

Table 4 Overview of interviewed participants and cross-language setting of the research

Since Alpha and foreign suppliers communicate and work in English, it can be assumed that the level of English is sufficient, thus reduces the effect of language barriers. To ensure some structure regarding cross-case comparability, a combination of closed- and open-questions were used in the interview guide.[113]

3.4 Analysis of the collected data through a thematic framework approach:

Unlike quantitative data analysis the analysis of qualitative data has not reached the level of codification and analytic procedures. However, there are broad guidelines for qualitative data analysis, one of the most used approaches is referred as thematic analysis.[114] To analyse the collected data a framework approach for thematic analysis is used. The framework method is appropriate as a systematic analysis method, when it is desired to generate themes by making comparisons within and between cases. The framework method approach is not bounded to an inductive or deductive approach to analyse data, which makes this method flexible. The difference between how themes are selected, determines if a deductive or inductive approach is more appropriate. With the research goal in mind, themes are rather determined on a deductive approach than an inductive approach.[115]A clarification for thematic is "(…) a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns with data." [116]. Advantages of thematic analysis are, summarization of key features of a large body of data, flexibility, emphasize on similarities

---

[113] See Bryman and Bell(2015), "p. 417-419"
[114] See Bryman and Bell(2015), p. 636
[115] See Gale et al. (2013), "p. 2-3"
[116] See Braun and Clarke (2006), p. 79

and differences across the data set and the accessibility to researchers with no or little experience of qualitative research.[117] By applying the framework approach it is possible to compare and contrast data across cases while also maintaining the connection of other aspects of each individual case.[118] The framework approach is suitable to manage and present data for thematic analysis. However, the framework for thematic analysis does not explain how to identify themes.[119] As a final note the framework approach is not suitable for highly heterogeneous data.[120]

In order to answer the stated research question, it is required to examine antecedents and drivers that contribute to supplier satisfaction. As described in table 1 the antecedents identified by Hüttinger et al. (2014) and Vos et al. (2016) and the construct of flexibility as part of relational behaviour are used for this research. The research model is represented in figure 1.

The research model, as presented in 2.8 provides a guideline in order to answer the stated research question. In which supplier satisfaction is part of the overarching framework of the concept of preferred customer. The described procedure for a thematic framework approach consists of seven steps namely 1) transcription 2) familiarization with the interview 3) coding 4) developing a working analytical framework 5) applying the analytical framework 6) charting data into the framework matrix 7) interpreting the date.[121] However, there is no fixed set for the construction of a matrix for thematic analysis. Furthermore, the construction of a matrix is a creative and systematic task, that enables the researcher to understand the collected data.[122] With our research goal in mind, constructs related to supplier satisfaction, should be included into the matrix. Therefore, the analytical framework is deducted from literature on supplier satisfaction and included in the interview guide. For this research a separate framework approach is conducted for both perspectives, thus the buyer's and the supplier's perspective for each supplier. This in order to compare both perspectives on how both buyer and supplier perceive the relationship.

---

[117] See Braun and Clarke(2006), p. 97
[118] See Gale et al. (2013), p. 2
[119] See Bryman and Bell (2015), "p. 599-560"
[120] See Gale et al.(2013), p. 2
[121] See Gale et al. (2013), "p. 4-5"
[122] See Miles et al.(2014), "p. 113-116"

The first step of the framework approach was to transcribe the gathered data. After the participants were interviewed the interviews were transcribed. Secondly, while transcribing the interviews the researcher became familiar with the gathered data. The familiarization of the data is important for the researcher in order to interpret the data. On the third place the transcriptions got coded with the help of Atlas ti.8, which kept track of the used codes. Due to the classification of collected data into codes, data could be compared systematically with other data. When a participant gave no or limited explanation or when the participant gave an answer which is not related to the asked question, this was noted for further analysis. Fourthly, it is important to group codes into categories, whereby the identified categories serve as a working analytical framework.[123] With the stated research question in mind each supplier served as a category in order to analyse the data. The fifth step of the framework approach was to apply to analytical framework followed by the sixth step by charting data into the framework. The final step was to interpret the collected and analysed data, the interpretation of the data is presented in the next chapter.

---

[123] See Gale et al. (2013), "p. 4-5"

4. Perception differences and similarities described from the buyer's and supplier's perspective.

This chapter discusses the analysed data, for both perspectives a within and a cross-case analysis was conducted. Both the buyers and suppliers' perspectives are analysed through a thematic framework approach. On beforehand it has to be emphasized that this chapter focusses on the description of (possible) perception differences and thus not an explanation for perception differences.

4.1 Within-case analysis to determine what the buyer perceives

As not all questions in the interview guide were supplier specific, some general findings about supplier satisfaction, perceptual agreement within the business units and occurred conflicts are represented. At the beginning of the interview it was required, to get a better understanding of what the buyers' perspective perceived as most important within the buyer-supplier relationship (BSR). This was helpful in order to understand the relationship between the buyer's perspective and supplier. From the buyer's perspective all the participants have a similar role namely 'operations manager'. Within the buyer's perspective the business units have different opinions as what they consider as most important within the buyer-supplier relationship, as illustrated in table 5. There is a shared belief among the participants from the buyer's perspective, that a supplier is satisfied when they are able to generate profit within the relationship as shown in table 5.

Business unit at buyer's perspective	Most important aspect within BSR	Supplier satisfaction
Charlie	Reliability; cultural fit; flexibility	Profitability; reliability; fulfilment of expectations of both sides
Beta	Quality; price; delivery performance	Profitability
Delta	Reliability; Care taking of buyer demands	Profitability; operative excellence
Foxtrot	Reliability	Profitability; reliability;

| Echo | Clear communication; Trust | Alignment of processes between buyer-supplier; operative excellence |

Table 5: The buyer's perspective opinion regarding supplier satisfaction

In order to understand if supplier satisfaction is established between individuals, business units or whole organisations, it was important to gain insights on how colleagues of the participant perceived the relationship with a supplier. The respondents believe that colleagues within their business units perceive the relationship with their respective suppliers in a similar way. From a buyer's perspective most, occurred conflicts within the buyer-supplier relationship are related to either performance outcomes or goal emphasis, where the latter refers to that both buyer and supplier strive their respective targets.

4.1.1 Beta is not satisfied with the supplier Golf, while Charlie and Delta are satisfied

There is difference between how the three business units which are connected to this supplier perceive the relationship. Charlie perceives the relationship with Golf as a good relationship, due to openness's and good communication from both perspectives. However, Charlie is aware that the demand of the business unit Charli is sometimes difficult for Golf. In contradiction to Charlie the business units Beta and Delta perceive the relationship in a more negative way. Beta experienced issues related to on time delivery and believes that Golf is giving more attention to other business units. The problem related to delivery is created by Golf, due to production capacity according to Beta. Delta also experienced issues related to on time delivery, however this starts to improve. According to Delta the problem related to delivery is created by that Golf got awarded with too many products and therefore had not enough capacity at the time.

Charlie has a general believe that suppliers experienced difficulties in the past due to the organisational structure of Alpha. Therefore, it was unclear for the supplier who made the decisions in the past, it has to pointed out that this start to improve. As mentioned earlier Beta believes that Golf is focusing more on other business units and therefore is more satisfied with other business units. The business unit Delta believes that Golf is worried about the growth opportunities for this business unit.

There is a difference between the business unit regarding growth opportunities for Golf. Where Charlie perceives that Golf is satisfied with offered growth opportunities, because they fulfilled the expectation regarding revenue, nevertheless revenue is project driven and thus forecasts are unstable. While Delta perceives that Golf is dissatisfied, due to a decrease in sales. Another difference between Delta and Charlie is that Delta indicates that Golf learnt, thus innovation possibilities, from Alpha in the past, yet no or limited explanations were given. Regarding operative excellence Charlie perceives that Golf is dissatisfied, due to that sales are project driven and thus unstable. Where Delta perceives the opposite due to that their sales are stable. There is a difference between the business unit on them believe of how reliable Golf regards Alpha. The business unit Charlie believes that Golf doesn't regard them as reliable due to fluctuations in forecast. Both Beta and Delta believe that Golf regard them as reliable. Charlie and Delta both believe that Golf is satisfied with the profitability of the relationship. Where Beta believes that Golf is unsatisfied due to current discussions about the price. All the business units believe that Golf is satisfied with the flexibility of Alpha. Finally, all three business units believe that Golf is satisfied with them.

From the buyer's perspective Beta doesn't perceive the supplier Golf as a reliable partner due to that they have the feeling, that they aren't being treated equally compared to other business units, this is supported by the following quote.

Beta"(…) Furthermore, regarding communication with Golf, we as business unit, are the smallest business unit within Alpha that is doing business with Golf. We notice, we feel that we are neglected by Golf. We are orientating, how we are going to deal with this. A result might be that we are going to look for another supplier."[124] (case 1, personal communication, June, 2018)

Additionally, Delta does not perceive Golf as reliable based upon poor delivery performance. The business units Charlie and Beta gave no or limited explanation regarding, if they perceive that Golf is satisfied with the support of the buyer's perspective. Delta indicated that they supported Golf in order to improve performance. The business unit Beta is very dissatisfied with the profitability of Golf compared with the other business units, this due to that Golf announced

---

[124] Beta "(…) Daarnaast is het contact qua communicatie met Golf, wij als marktgroep zijnde, de kleinste groep van Alpha binnen Golf. En daar merken we ook, dat we er een beetje bij gedaan worden. We zijn zelf aan het oriënteren, hoe we hier nu mee verder gaan. Het kan er best uitkomen, dat we naar een andere leverancier toe gaan."

an increase in cost price. All three business units perceive Golf as flexible. To conclude Beta is very dissatisfied compared with Charlie and Delta about Golf, Beta their dissatisfaction is mainly caused by reliability and a price increase. As shown in figure 3 Beta is dissatisfied, while Charlie and Delta are satisfied with Golf. A red line with an arrowhead represents that the business unit is dissatisfied, where the green line with an arrowhead represents that the business unit is satisfied.
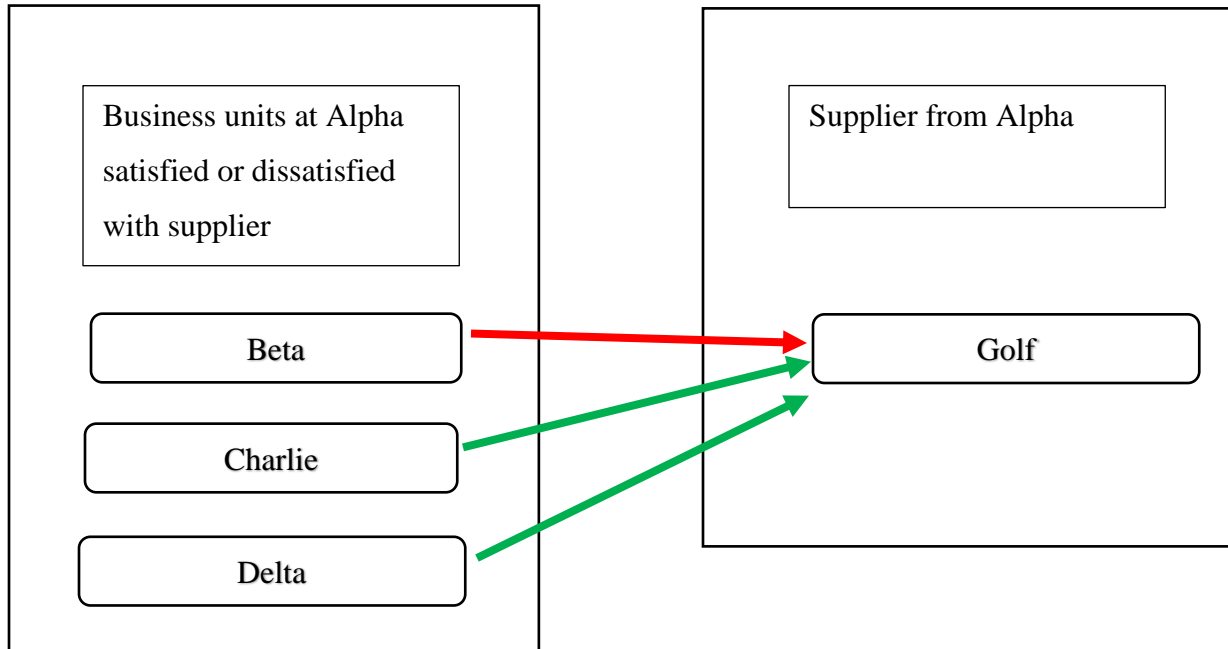
Figure 3 Satisfaction overview from the buyer's perspective regarding Golf

Charlie believes that they fulfilled the supplier's expectation regarding expected revenue, nonetheless Charlie believes that suppliers in general underestimated they organisational structure of Alpha, Beta believes that the expectations are fulfilled regarding revenue, but there are some expectations which are not completely fulfilled. To finalize, Delta believes that they didn't fulfilled the expectations of Golf regarding sales volume, since the supplier expected more.

4.1.2 Delta perceives Hotel not as reliable and is therefore dissatisfied

The first business unit Charlie perceives it as good relationship with openness and good communication. Beta indicates that they have a good relationship with Hotel. The third business unit Delta perceives that there are issues related to quality and on time delivery. Charlie gave no answer on how they believe that Hotel perceives the relationship. Since Hotel is a smaller

supplier for Charlie in terms of revenue, Hotel was not discussed extensively. Beta believes that Hotel has a mutual perception about the relationship as themselves. Delta believes that profitability is an issue for Hotel.

The business units Beta and Delta both believe that Hotel is satisfied with the offered growth opportunities, both business units fulfilled Hotel their expectation regarding revenue. Where the business unit Charlie believes that Hotel is dissatisfied, nonetheless it has to be noted that no or limited explanation was given by Charlie. Beta and Delta perceive that Hotel is satisfied with the offered innovation possibilities. Where Charlie perceives that Hotel is not interested in the offered innovation possibilities. All the business units perceive that Hotel is satisfied with the operative excellence of the buyer's perspective. All three business units believe that Hotel perceives Alpha as a reliable partner and that Alpha fulfilled the made agreements. There is a difference between the believe how satisfied Hotel is about the profitability of the relationship. Charlie and Beta believe that Hotel is satisfied with the profitability, while Delta believes that Hotel is very dissatisfied about the profitability. Furthermore, all business units believe that Hotel is satisfied with the flexibility of Alpha. In general, in all business units believe that Hotel is satisfied with Alpha.

An observable difference is that Charlie and Beta perceive Hotel as a reliable partner, where Delta is dissatisfied with Hotel their reliability. Delta their dissatisfaction regarding reliability is caused by delivery and quality issues. In addition, all three business units perceive that Hotel contributes to their profitability and perceive Hotel as flexible. To conclude Delta is dissatisfied with Hotel, while Charlie and Beta are satisfied with the relationship, they have with Hotel. The dissatisfaction of Delta is supported by the following quote.

Delta "(…) I believe that we can be satisfied in the future, but at this moment not yet. At this moment Hotel is graded with a 5. India scores a 7. And Golf scores a 6. The reason why Golf scores better than Hotel is that we have less complaints about Golf. When Hotel puts more effort into the relationship, I believe we have a supplier with potential for the future."[125] (case 3, personal communication, June, 2018)

---

[125] Delta "(…) Ik denk dat er wel de situatie gaat komen dat wij tevreden gaan zijn, alleen op dit moment nog niet. Op dit moment zit Hotel op een 5. India nou die zet ik gewoon op een 7. En Golf op een 6. En met name daar

From the point of view from Beta, which is satisfied, stated the following. Due to relational behaviour between the business unit and the supplier, the occurred quality issues influence their satisfaction less.

Beta "(…) Regarding our contacts with Hotel, also personal contact, with involved persons, is good. Hotel reacts adequate when we have questions. So that is sufficient, there are some issues regarding quality. Issues that occurred too often until now. However, recently we agreed upon a plan to improve those quality issues. "[126] (case 1, personal communication, June, 2018)

As mentioned earlier the business unit Delta is not satisfied with the supplier Hole, while the business units Beta and Charlie are satisfied with Hotel, as illustrated in figure 4.
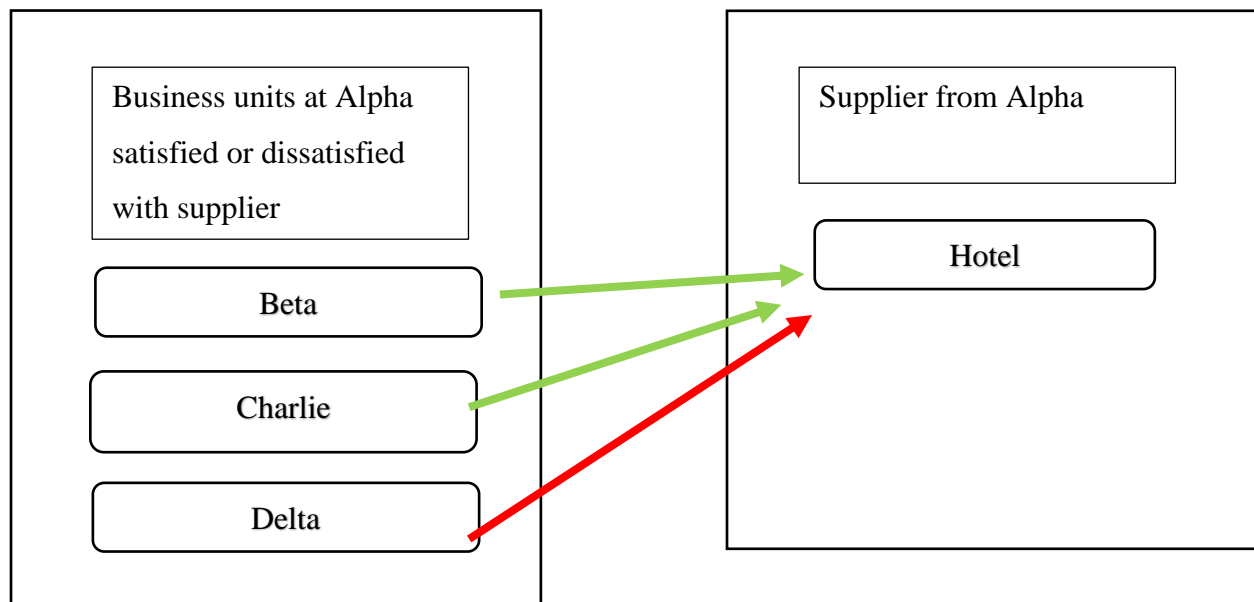
Figure 4 Satisfaction overview from the buyer's perspective regarding Hotel

On the other hand, it has to be pointed out that Delta is worried about the future of the relationship. This feeling is created by Hotel that indicated that the profitability of the

---

hebben we minder klachten bij Hotel, qua kwaliteit. Hotel moet nog iets harder werken, dan denk ik dat we in potentie wel leveranciers hebben waar we de toekomst mee in kunnen."
[126] Beta"(…) Qua contacten met Hotel, ook persoonlijk met de mensen, waar we dus vrij veel mee te maken hebben, dat loopt goed. Er wordt heel adequaat gereageerd als er vragen zijn over aan- en of opmerkingen. Dus dat gaat goed, er zijn wel wat kwaliteit issues met Hotel. Die echt te vaak voorgekomen zijn tot nu toe. Maar daar zijn momenteel bezig met een verbeterplan omdat echt te voorkomen."

relationship has to be improved. Likewise, Delta pointed out that the perception of Hotel is influenced by other business units, this is supported with the following quote.

Delta "(…) The threat is that the perception of Hotel also gets influence by other business units from Alpha. Hotel indicates that they have too much stock of Beta. And in comparison, they don't have that much purchase orders. That doesn't contribute to a positive perception. "[127] (case 3, personal communication, June, 2018)

Hence, Alpha has to be aware of how Hotel perceives the relationship with Alpha and the involved business units. The business unit Beta and Delta believe that they fulfilled Hotel their expectation regarding revenue.

4.1.3 Delta, Echo and Foxtrot are satisfied with the supplier India; however, Foxtrot perceives growth opportunities, operative excellence, reliability and profitability differently.

To begin with India is for Delta a smaller supplier and therefore Delta perceives that India receives less attention as other suppliers. Secondly, the business unit Echo perceives the relationship with India as good, nonetheless there is room for improvement regarding operational aspects. Echo emphasized that India might be awarded with too many products, therefore it is harder for them to perform well. Foxtrot perceives the relationship with India as a relationship with poor communication. Additionally, Foxtrot suffered issues regarding testing equipment and the sourcing team got smaller, while this business unit is at the starting phase of the outsource process.

The business unit Foxtrot believes that India perceives the relationship as difficult and exhausting. Additionally, Echo believes that India perceives the demand of the buyer as unstable.

The business units Delta and Echo believe that India is satisfied with the offered growth opportunities. Where Foxtrot perceives that India is dissatisfied with the growth opportunities, this due to their cost price. Nonetheless, this explanation might not be valid, since growth opportunities refers to generating new opportunities through the relationship. A major difference

---

[127]Delta "(…) Het gevaar dat ik daar wel zie, is dat als bij Hotel die perceptie mede wordt gecreëerd door bijvoorbeeld andere marktgroepen, dan, zij geven ook aan voor Beta hebben wij heel veel voorraad liggen. En in verhouding niet zoveel order, ja dat draagt ook niet bij aan de goede perceptie van de relatie"

between the involved business units is that Foxtrot perceives that India does not regard innovation possibilities as antecedent for supplier satisfaction. Another difference is that Delta and Foxtrot perceive that India is dissatisfied with the operative excellence, while Echo perceives that India is satisfied with the operative excellence. The three business units Delta, Echo and Foxtrot all perceive India as a reliable partner. There is a little difference between the business units and them believes on how satisfied India is with the buyer's reliability. Delta and Echo believe that India is satisfied with Alpha their reliability. While Foxtrot believes that India is a bit dissatisfied about the profitability and reliability, caused by the idea that the processes are not fully optimized. The business units Delta and Echo believe the opposite namely that India is satisfied about the profitability. All business units believe that India is satisfied about the flexibility of Alpha. To conclude all business units, believe that India is satisfied with Alpha as partner.

Another difference is that both Delta and Foxtrot perceive that they are not supporting India in order to improve performance, however Echo perceives that India is satisfied with their support, this is supported with the following quotes.

Foxtrot "(...) That is also valid for India. Awarding a supplier with too many products is one thing, but it would be nice if everything worked out regarding operational aspects, that is not the case. This resulted into in a complex situation, on which you never can be satisfied about. "[128] (case 2, personal communication, June, 2018)

Regarding the profitability of the buyer's perspective no or limited explanation was given by the involved business units. Delta is the only business unit which is satisfied with the profitability of India. The business units are in perceptual agreement regarding the perceived flexibility of India, all business units perceive India as a flexible partner. To finalize the three business units Delta,

---

[128] Foxtrot"(...) "En dat geldt eigenlijk voor India precies hetzelfde. Het volstoppen van iets, is één, dan zal het mooi zijn als het allemaal operationeel vlekkeloos verloopt, dat is niet het geval. Daardoor ben je in een hele complexe situatie belandt, en kun je daar onmogelijk tevreden over zijn."

Foxtrot and Echo are satisfied, as illustrated in figure 5, with the relationship they have with India.
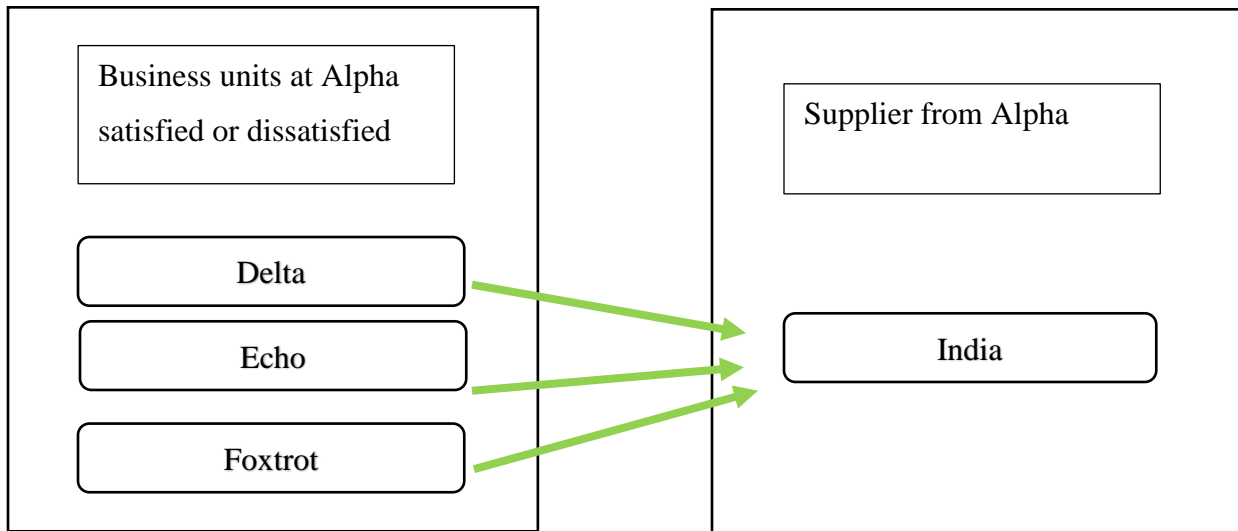
Figure 5 Satisfaction overview from the buyer's perspective regarding India

Additionally, Delta and Echo gave no answer on if they fulfilled India their expectation. Finally, Foxtrot believes that Alpha fulfilled India their expectation regarding revenue.

4.1.4 Both Beta and Echo are satisfied with the supplier Juliet, no perceptual distance between the business units.

The business unit Beta perceives the relationship with Juliet as a learning process. Recently Juliet and Beta agreed upon a plan in order to improve operational performance, nevertheless it has to be mentioned that the relational aspects within the relationship are good. Echo has the general perception that the relationship is good, likewise as Beta there is room for improvement regarding operational performance. Beta believes that Juliet has a similar perception about the relationship. Where there is room for improvement regarding operational performance and where in the relational aspects are good. Echo believes that suppliers perceive the buyers demand as unstable.

From the buyer's perspective the business units Beta and Echo both perceive that Juliet is satisfied with the offered growth opportunities. Both business units believe that they fulfilled Juliet their expectation regarding revenue. Regarding innovation possibilities and operative excellence both Beta and Echo are in alignment, and they perceive that Juliet is satisfied.

Regarding reliability, profitability, and flexibility both business units believe that Juliet is satisfied. In addition, both business units believe that Juliet is satisfied with Alpha as a partner.

Likewise, Echo and Beta perceive Juliet as reliable partner, a reason for this is that Juliet their communication is clear towards the business units. From the point of view regarding supplier support, Echo and Beta believe that they are supporting Juliet in order to improve performance, thus Juliet is satisfied with offered help of the buyer's perspective. Correspondingly, both business units perceive that Juliet contributes to the buyer's profitability. Additionally, there is also no difference between Beta and Echo in respect of on how they perceive Juliet in terms of flexibility, both business units are satisfied with the flexibility of Juliet. As shown in figure 6, both business units are satisfied with the relationship they have with Juliet.
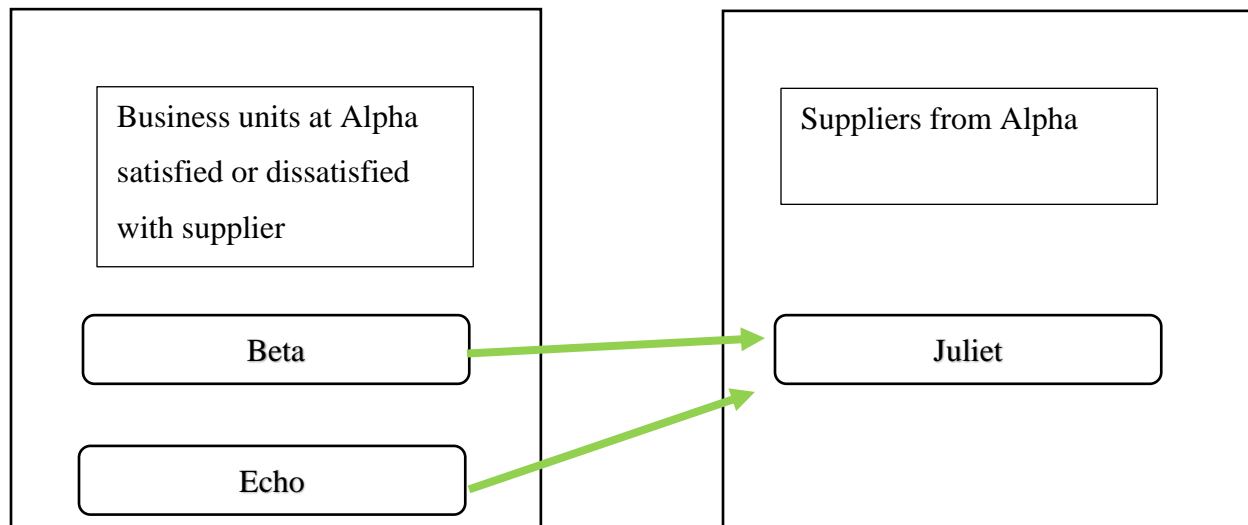
Figure 6 Satisfaction overview from the buyer's perspective units regarding Juliet

Both business units are satisfied with the relationship they have with Juliet, this is supported by the following quote.

Beta "(…) I believe Juliet is as well positive about the contacts. Of course, there are always changes within the relationship. The relational part is positive, regarding operation aspects there is room for improvement."[129] (case 1, personal communication, June, 2018)

---

[129] Beta "(…) Juliet is denk ik ook redelijk positief over de contacten, in ieder geval wel over de contacten. Er verandert natuurlijk wel eens wat, dat is een zaak van, dat is iets van ja. Het relationele loopt gewoon goed, op operationeel gebied kan het wel iets beter."

To conclude both business units are satisfied with the relationship they have with Juliet. This is supported by Beta who believes that Beta fulfilled Juliet their expectation regarding revenue. Finally, it has to be pointed out that the participants gave no or limited explanation for several asked questions regarding Juliet.

4.1.5. Foxtrot perceives that Lima is only satisfied with a certain business unit, while Lima is dissatisfied about Alpha as an organisation

Similarly, as with other suppliers Echo perceives the relationship as good with Lima and that there is room for improvement regarding operational performance. Foxtrot has the general perception that communication between buyer and supplier is poor. In addition, there were some issues regarding testing equipment and the sourcing team got smaller, while this business unit is at the start of the outsource project.

Foxtrot believes that Lima perceives Alpha as chaotic and unstable, nevertheless Lima is satisfied with this specific business unit. Echo believes that suppliers perceive they buyers demand as unstable.

Both business units believe that Lima is dissatisfied about the growth opportunities This is supported by the following quote.

Foxtrot "(..) Lima won't be satisfied about the growth opportunities, since they are interested in more products. We currently have one product that is operating well at Lima. From other business units they got assigned with products as well. So, I believe Lima is dissatisfied about the growth. They won't be very dissatisfied, because they got a foundation as promised. And that foundation is meeting the expectation. I believe they grade the growth opportunities as a 4 or a 5."[130] (case 2, personal communication, June, 2018)

---

[130] Foxtrot: (..) "Lima zal niet tevreden zijn over de groeikansen, omdat er een worst voor gehouden is van meerdere producten. En we hebben maar één product dat daar eigenlijk goed loopt. Van andere marktgroepen hadden ze ook wat producten toebedeeld gekregen. Dus ik denk dat Lima daar ontevreden is over de groei die we doorgemaakt hebben. Ze zullen niet very dissatisfied zijn, ze hebben wel een basis gehad. En die klopt met de verwachting, het product dat loopt, loopt volgens verwachting. Ik verwacht dat het meer een 4 of een 5 is, maar daar blijft het dan bij."

There is a difference between both business units regarding innovation possibilities. Echo perceives that Lima is satisfied with the offered innovation possibilities, however no or limited explanation was given. In contradiction Foxtrot perceives that innovation possibilities are not regarded as applicable in order to satisfy Lima at the moment, since they transferred already designed products. From Echo their point of view they believe that Lima is satisfied with how efficient operations are managed. Unlike, Echo the business unit Foxtrot believes that Lima is dissatisfied about how operations are managed, especially the decision-making. It has to be noted that Foxtrot believes that Lima is satisfied with this specific business unit regarding operative excellence. Both business unit believe that Lima does not regard Alpha as a reliable partner. There is a difference between both units regarding the belief if Lima is satisfied with the profitability, where Echo believes that Lima is satisfied and where Foxtrot believes that Lima is dissatisfied. Both business units believe that Lima is satisfied with Alpha their flexibility. Echo believes that Lima is satisfied with the relationship they have with Alpha. Where Foxtrot believes that Lima is only satisfied with the business unit Foxtrot and in which Lima is dissatisfied with Alpha in general.

From the buyer's perspective both business units believe that Lima is not contributing to the profitability of Alpha. Regarding reliability both business units perceive Lima as a reliable partner. There is a difference between the perception if the business units support Lima in order to improve performance. Echo has the perception that they are supporting Lima, and that therefore Lima is satisfied. While Foxtrot has the perception that the support from the buyer's perspective is lacking and that Lima is therefore dissatisfied. Both business units are satisfied with the flexibility of Lima. In general, both business units are satisfied with Lima, as shown in

figure 7, nonetheless there is room for improvement also regarding issues at the buyer's perspective.
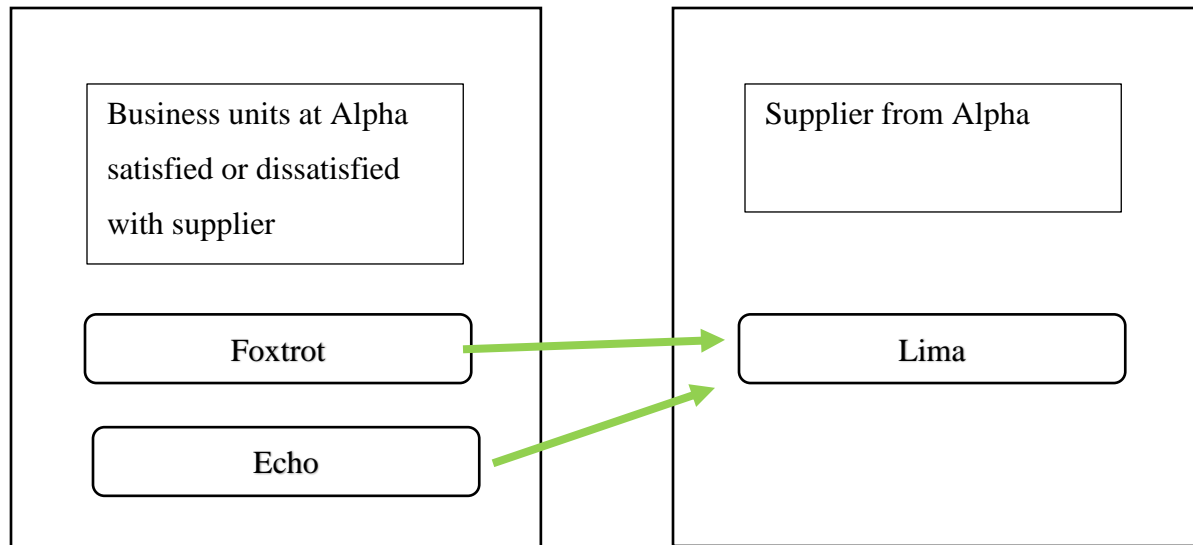
Figure 7 Satisfaction overview from the buyer's perspective regarding Lima

Additionally, Foxtrot points out that Alpha did not fulfilled the expectation of Lima, since Lima expected more products and only got awarded with one product. As a final remark it has to be mentioned that Echo gave in most cases no or limited explanation.

4.1.6. No major differences between Charlie and Beta and their relation with Kilo

To begin with it has to be emphasized that Kilo is perceived differently as other strategic suppliers. Since other researched suppliers are electronic-manufacturing-service providers, while Kilo produces metal frames for this reason, participants from the buyer's perspective didn't discussed Kilo as detailed as other suppliers.

The business unit Beta experienced issues regarding on time delivery and a price discussion in the past. The involved business units did not discuss on how they believe that Kilo perceives the relationship.

The business units Charlie and Beta both perceive that Kilo is satisfied with the offered growth opportunities. Furthermore, Charlie perceives that Kilo does not regard innovation possibilities as an antecedent for supplier satisfaction. While Beta perceives that Kilo is satisfied about the offered innovation possibilities. On the third place Beta and Charlie both perceive that Kilo is

satisfied with the operative excellence of the relationship. On the fourth place both Beta and Charlie believe that Kilo is satisfied with Alpha their reliability. Likewise, both business units believe that Kilo is satisfied with the profitability of the relationship. They also believe that Kilo is satisfied with Alpha their flexibility. To summarize both business units believe that Kilo is satisfied with the relationship they have with Alpha.

From the buyer's perspective Beta is not satisfied with the reliability of Kilo, nonetheless Charlie perceives Kilo as a reliable partner. The dissatisfaction of Beta is created by capacity problems in the past. Another point on which Charlie and Beta disagree is the profitability of Kilo, Charlie is satisfied, while Beta is less satisfied due to a price increase. Furthermore, Charlie and Beta both perceive that they are helping Kilo in order to improve performance. Additionally, Charlie and Beta both are satisfied with the perceived flexibility of Kilo. As illustrated in figure 8 Beta and Charlie are satisfied with the supplier Kilo.

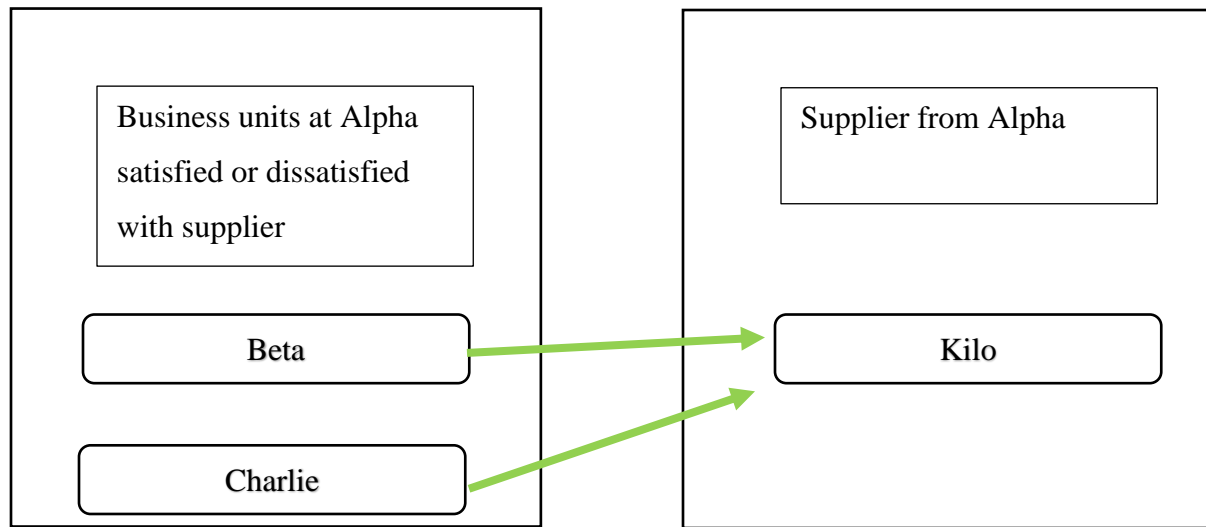*Figure 8 Satisfaction overview from the buyer's perspective regarding Kilo*

To conclude both Charlie and Beta are satisfied with the relationship they have with Kilo. Both business units didn't suggest if the expectations of Kilo were fulfilled or not.

4.2 Within-case analysis to determine what the suppliers perceive

This section describes how the supplier's from Alpha perceive the relationship with Alpha.

4.2.1 From a commercial and operational role 'innovation possibilities' is perceived differently at the supplier Golf

From the supplier Golf two employees participated, one participant was working in a sales role and the other participants was involved more in the operational aspects of the relationship, as shown in table 6.

Company	Respondent's position	Employees	Language interview	Native language respondent
Golf	Chief Commercial Officer	1.000-2.500	Dutch	Dutch
Golf	Operations manager	1.000-2.500	Dutch	Dutch

Table 6: Supplier overview Golf

To start with the Chief Commercial Officer stated that an alignment between the goal between buyer and supplier is the most important aspect within a buyer-supplier relationship. Where the operation managers stated that mutual trust is the most important aspect within the buyer-supplier relationship. Moreover, the Chief Commercial Officer is satisfied when the contractual obligations are met, operations are managed in an efficient way and when there is trust in the relationship. From the operations managers perspective the supplier is satisfied when the customer is satisfied while at the same time operations are managed in an efficient way.

Both actors have a positive feeling about the relationship. The Chief Commercial Officer perceives that there is trust within the relationship and that there is alignment between the goals of buyer and supplier. Furthermore, the operations manager stated that he has a positive personal relationship with the supplier and the he didn't perceive any problems.

The interviewed participated with the role as Chief Commercial Officer couldn't answer the question regarding growth opportunities, due to that Alpha and Golf are currently negotiating. While the participants with the role as Operations Manager indicated that Golf is dissatisfied about the growth opportunities, this due to a decline in sales for a specific business unit and sales for the other business is saturated or limited. An observed difference between the different actors is that from a sales perspective 'innovation possibilities' is not considered as an antecedent, because the buyer's perspective is the designer of the product and therefore innovation possibilities are constraint. On the other hand, the interviewed participant which was more involved in cost calculation and the transfer process of products, perceives that both parties can

learn from each other through mutual-problem solving. Regarding the operations both participants stated they are satisfied with the operations. The operative excellence from the buyer's side is perceived as stable and clear from the supplier's perspective. It has to be pointed out that the supplier perceives differences between the business units, nevertheless the chief commercial officer stated it is their responsibility to cope with the differences between the business units.

Chief Commercial Officer "(…) Because the three business units, all serve a completely different market segment. And each market segment has its own identity. Of course, we observe that the business units are structured based upon the market. I believe that it is our responsibility to deal with the different structures of the business units. "[131]. (case 4, skype, July, 2018)

Additionally, both participants felt that the buyer's perspective helped them to increase performance, especially when the supplier suffered difficulties in order to carry out their tasks. Likewise, the buyer is perceived as flexible, nonetheless it has to be pointed out that this is dependent on business unit, subject and if the supplier is informed on beforehand. Both actors are very satisfied about the relationship they have with Alpha, as illustrated in figure 9. Additionally, the Chief Commercial Officer has a positive feeling about the future of the relationship.

---

[131] Chief Commercial Officer "(…) Omdat het drie zulke, ze bedienen drie complete andere markten. En elke markt heeft z'n eigen eigenheid en wat je merkt, natuurlijk dat de marktgroepen van Alpha daarop georganiseerd zijn. Ik vind dat het aan ons is om daar mee over weg te kunnen gaan".
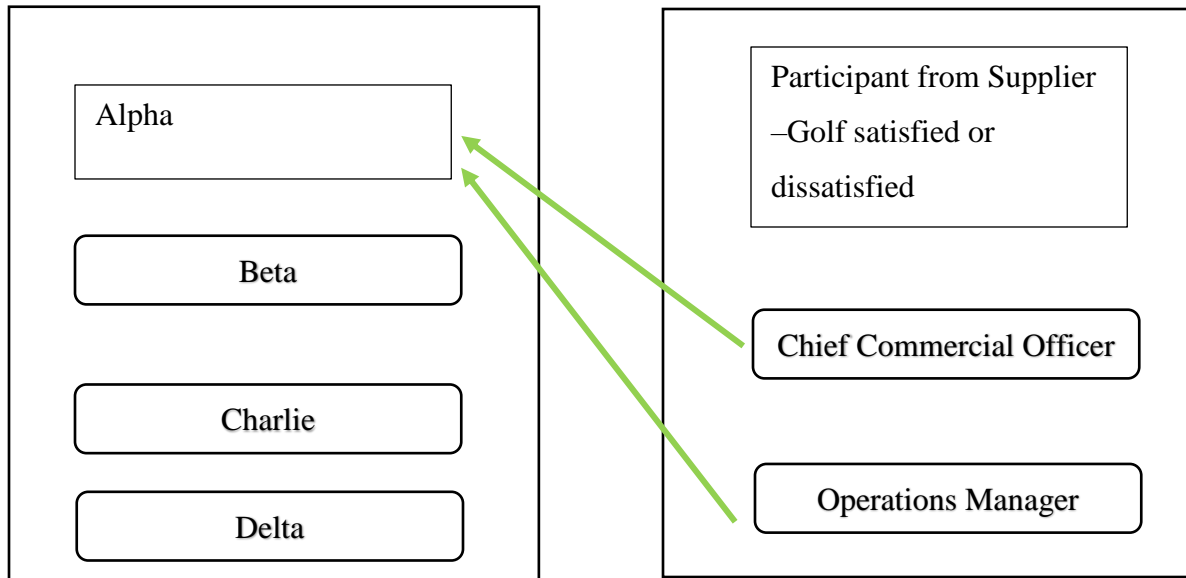
Figure 9 Satisfaction overview from Golf's perspective regarding Alpha

The expectation of the supplier yet is not completely fulfilled by the buyer according to the Chief Commercial Officer. A reason for this is that the supplier got awarded with a different product group, then their initial intention was. It has to be pointed out that an expectation might be created as well by the buyer or that the supplier creates its own expectation. From the operations managers perspective his expectations were met.

The Chief Commercial Manager noticed differences between the business units, due to specific demands of the business units. Additionally, he stated that it's the suppliers their responsibility to cope with those differences. In addition, the operations manager observed small differences at the start of the outsource process. The operations manager indicates that he is satisfied with all business units. The Chief Commercial Officer stated that there is perceptual alignment between the colleagues at the Golf, however it depends upon the role of an individual. The operations manager gave no answer on how his colleagues perceived the relationship with Alpha. Occurred conflicts are related to performance and are perceived as a learning process according to the Chief Commercial Officer. Additionally, the Chief Commercial Officer stated there is a need for a more clear and transparent communication, about the strategy towards strategic suppliers from the buyer's perspective.

4.2.2 From Hotel's account manager's perspective 'operative excellence' should be measured at business unit level rather than the buying organisation as a whole.

From the supplier Hotel participated four actors, as shown in table 7, all actors had a different position within Hotel.

Company	Respondent's position	Employees	Language interview	Native language respondent
Hotel	Director business unit	>10.000	English	German
Hotel	Deputy director business unit	>10.000	English	German
Hotel	Account manager	>10.000	English	Hungarian
Hotel	Material program manager	>10.000	English	German

Table 7: Supplier overview Hotel:

To start with all actors gave a different answer on what the perceive as most important within a buyer-supplier relationship. The business unit director stated that the profitability for both parties is the most important. Where the deputy director of the business unit is more concerned about the trust and information sharing. From an account manager perspective, it is most important that the customer is satisfied. The material program manager stated that trust and communication are the most important aspects within a buyer-supplier relationship. Furthermore, the business unit director stated that Hotel is satisfied when the relationship is profitable and when there is an alignment between a mutual goal. The deputy business also is concerned about the profitability and also stated growth opportunities as antecedent for supplier satisfaction. The account manager is satisfied when operations are managed in an efficient way and when the communication is good. The fourth actor indicated that that the supplier is satisfied when the relationship is profitable.

When asked to describe to relationship with Alpha all actors had a positive feeling about the relationship, even though that issues related to pricing and delivery dates occurred. From Hotel's perspective the supplier is satisfied about the relationship with Alpha regarding the growth opportunities, supplier support, reliability, operative excellence and flexibility of the partner. Regarding innovation possibilities, the material program manager was not able to answer the question if she was satisfied with the innovation possibilities or not. In addition, the deputy director business unit stated that first signs of innovation possibilities occurred within the relationship and therefore was not able to grade it yet. Both the director of the business unit and

the account manager indicated that they are satisfied with the innovation possibilities. Where the business unit director believes that the first discussions regarding new R&D products started. It has to be pointed that the account manager from Hotel indicated that there is a distinction regarding between the operative excellence of the business units. There seems to be a bit of perceptual distance between the interviewed actors, if the difference in perceived operative excellence is inconvenient or not.

Accountmanager:"(…)Because of the three business units. The communication and the methods within Alpha is not always the same. We have to find some other alternative way. I would say one positive action, should be in Alpha, would be to use standard processes for all the business units. I would say it's not a huge change or not a huge headache for us. But sometimes, we have done something for a business units, and we would like to do the same for another one. And then it turned out it was not possible, or the other business units didn't wants this. I would say, call it a little bit a headache. But I do not think so, we can't live together in this situation, but it can be improved." (case 5, telephone, July, 2018)

Deputy director business unit:"(…) It is already improved, I can see it is already improved. We had problems with it in the past. But it is already improved. At the moment, I can say, it's running much better, and it's okay for us" (case 6, telephone, July, 2018)

Director business unit "(…) No because, that is the good part, I would already call it a partnership. We are allowed, and even say forced to speak up, and to say where do we see a difference" (case 7, telephone, July, 2018)

It has to be emphasized that Hotel is concerned about the profitability of the relationship, due to internal reasons. On the other perspective the director business unit, material program manager and account manager believe that Alpha is satisfied with the price offered by Hotel. Where the deputy director business unit believes that Alpha is dissatisfied about the offered price.

Deputy director business unit"(…) I have the feeling, that they really expected more" (..)If Alpha would not outsource their products, they would also have had the problem that material prices increased"(case 6, telephone, July, 2018)

In general, all actors are satisfied about the relationship, as illustrated in figure 10 and the expectation regarding revenue is fulfilled, however there are some internal issues related to

profitability. When this internal problem is solved Hotel would even be more satisfied. Also, Hotel has a positive feeling for a long-term relationship with Alpha.
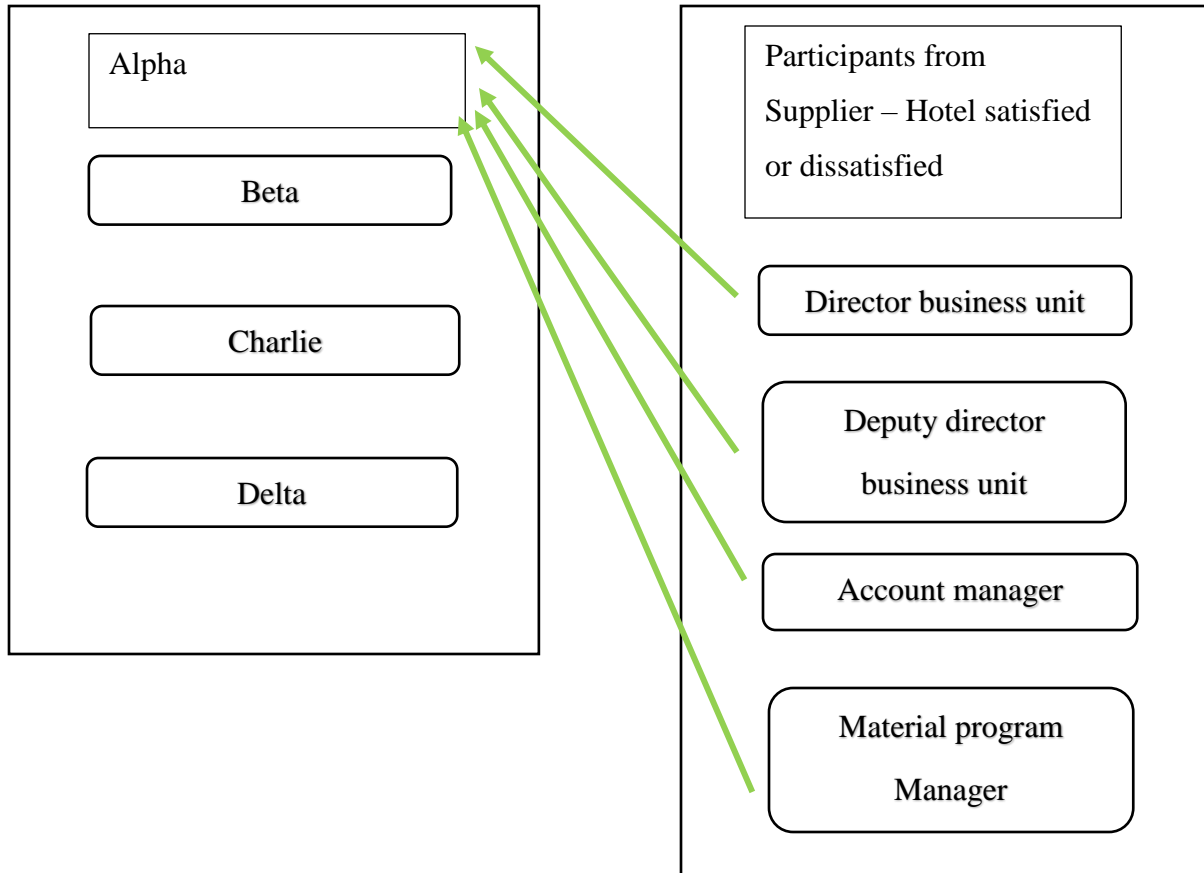
Figure 10 Satisfaction overview from Hotel's perspective regarding Alpha

Regarding the different business units involved from the buyer's perspective, Hotel in general does not perceive this as inconvenient. The observed differences are related to business unit specific demands and the involved individuals.

All actors perceive that other colleagues are satisfied as they are. The deputy and director business unit both indicate that occurred issues are related to delivery dates and profitability. The material program manager believes that occurred issues are not perceived as a conflict, but as a discussion.

4.2.3 The supplier India is very satisfied with their 'partnership' with Alpha

From the supplier India one person was assigned to participate, as shown in table 8 in the research, therefore it was not possible to compare results with other involved persons in the relationship from the supplier side.

Company	Respondents position	Employees	Language interview	Native language respondent
India	Sales manager	100-250	Dutch	Dutch

Table 8: Supplier overview India

The sales manager recognizes that the relationship has to be a partnership as most important criteria, rather than a buyer-supplier relationship. According to him a supplier is satisfied when there is trust, profitability and open discussions within the relationship.

In general, the supplier India is satisfied about the relationship, they acknowledge however that there is room for improvement.

Sales manager "(…) In general I' m very satisfied. Of course, there is room for improvement, however this shouldn't be a point that causes dissatisfaction."[132] (case 8, skype, July, 2018)

The sales manager stated the sales increased significantly due to the outsource project as intended and is therefore very satisfied about the growth opportunities. Secondly, the sales manager provides an example of joint innovation and process optimization, for this reason he is very satisfied about the innovation possibilities. Thirdly, the sales manager is satisfied about how efficient operations are managed by the buyer. Additionally, he stated that the India is capable enough to deal with the differences between business units. On the fourth place the sales manager perceives that there is mutual trust and respect between both parties. Therefore, he is very satisfied about the reliability. Moreover, the sales manager perceives that Alpha is supporting India in order to improve performance. On the sixth place the sales manager perceives that Alpha is satisfied with the offered price. Similarly, like previous described constructs India is satisfied about the flexibility of Alpha. To conclude India is very

---

[132] Salesmanager "(…) Nee ik ben zeer tevreden over het algemeen. Er zijn echt dingen die niet goed gaan, maar precies, daar moet je ook niet over struikelen."

satisfied, as illustrated in figure 11, with the relationship and they regard Alpha as a partner which fulfilled India their expectations.
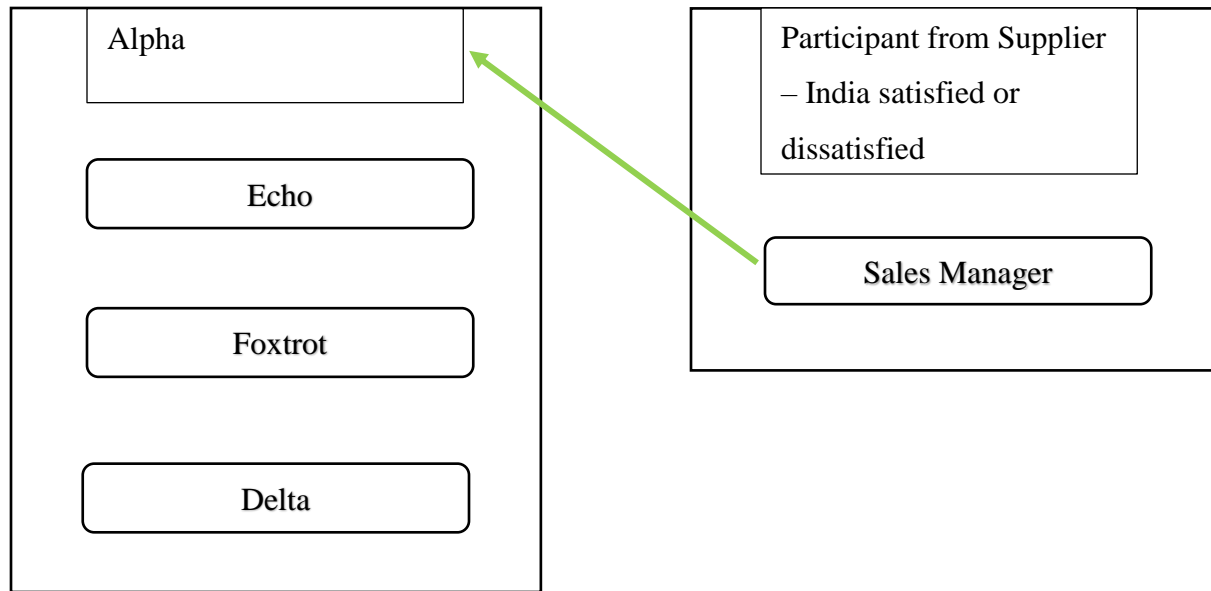
Figure 11 Satisfaction overview from India's perspective regarding Alpha.

The sales manager believes that other colleagues share a similar opinion about Alpha. In addition, he stated that occurred issues in the relationship should be regarded as a continuous learning process. To finalize he has a positive feeling about the relationship and acknowledges that there is room for improvement.

4.2.4 Juliet considers themselves as service provider and is therefore not interested in innovation possibilities

From the supplier Juliet three actors participated in this study as shown in table 9.

Company	Respondent's position	Employees	Language interview	Native language respondent
Juliet	New business development / sales manager	>10.000	English	English
Juliet	Operations manager	>10.000	English	Japanese
Juliet	Managing director	>10.000	English	Japanese

Table 9: Supplier overview Juliet

The managing director and operations manager both perceive the relationship as good with open discussions. From the sales manager perspective the relationship is perceived as good, where Alpha trusts and believes in Juliet. According to the manager director and operations manager

the most important in a buyer-supplier relationship is when the customer needs are met. Where the operations manager indicate that communication, openness and discussions are the most important aspects. All actors state that the supplier is satisfied when the customer is satisfied. Additionally, the sales manager pointed profitability out as antecedent for supplier satisfaction.

The supplier Juliet in general is very satisfied with the relationship they have with Alpha. Juliet is very satisfied about the growth opportunties, the operations which are managed in an efficient way ,reliability of the buyer, and supplier support within the partnership. However, Juliet doesn't regard innovation possiblities as antecedent, since Juliet is a serivce provider and therefore not the designer of the product.

In terms of profitablity the sales manager believes that Alpha is satisfied with the offered prices. Furthermore the sales manager is satisfied with flexiblity of Alpha., nonetheless he perceives it sometimes as difficult to receive information on time. In general all actors are satisfied about the partnership with Alpha, as illustrated in figure 12. Furthermore, according to the sales manager there is no expectation which is not fulfilled.

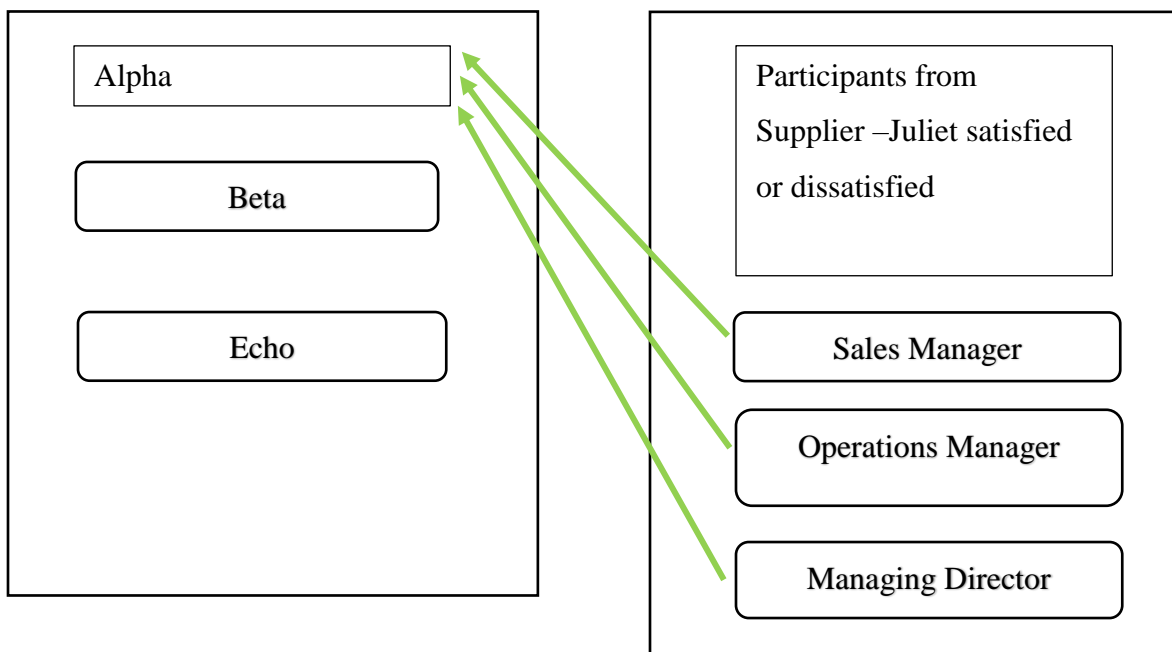*Figure 12 Satisfaction overview from Juliet's perspective regarding Alpha*

The sales manager indicate that he is satisfied with both business units, where the duration of the relationship determines how satisfied they are with each business unit. Additionally, the sales manager mentioned that Juliet is capable enough to deal with the different business units. The

managing director and operations manager indicate that they don't notice any major differences between the business units. Furthermore, all participants believe that other colleagues at Juliet are satisfied as they are. From a sales manager perspective the occurred conflicts are regarded as a learning process. While the managing director and operations manager indicate that no conflicts occurred during the relationship.

It has to be pointed out that from the cultural perspective particpants from Juliet are very polite in their approach towards the customer. Compared to other participants the researcher felt that the participants with a Japanse background gave social desirable their answers. As a final point it has to be emphasized that the managing director and operations manager gave in most cases no or limited explanation on the asked questions.

4.2.5 Lima is satisfied with Foxtrot, while being dissatisfied about Alpha as a whole organisation

To start with the role from the interviewed actors are pretty similar, as shown in table 10, however both participants are operating from a different location. Additionally, both participants have experience with different business units.

Company	Respondents position	Employees	Language interview	Native language respondent
Lima	General manager	2.500-5.000	English	German
Lima	Account manager	2.500-5.000	English	Dutch

Table 10: Supplier overview Lima

Both actors stated the most important aspect within the buyer-supplier relationship is that relationship has to be a partnership, rather than a buyer-supplier relationship. Moreover, both participants indicate that they are satisfied as a supplier when it is a mutual cooperation with trust and good communication.

Both participants are very satisfied about the offered growth opportunities and recognize the potential of Alpha as a customer. The Account manager is satisfied about the innovation possibilities with Foxtrot, due to the joint learning process. Where the general manager is very dissatisfied about the innovation possibilities. The account manager is satisfied regarding the efficiency of planning, processes and decision-making of Foxtrot, but he is diffused about decision-making in general at Alpha.

Account manager: "(…) I need to find a way to convince people. If I convince the one person, the other one says no. The decision-making is very unclear for me"(case 9, telephone, July, 2018)

This is confirmed by the general manager who is also dissatisfied about the decision-making. The supplier Lima is very unsatisfied about the relationship and in general perceives Alpha as not reliable. One of the reason is the change in strategy, which is supported by the following quote.

General manager "(…)The influence from the strategic purchasing department is really not high on the commercial aspect, the decision-makers are in the market group. He can only supports, he supports the market group and he supports us. But in the influencers are in the market group. That is changed between in the time when we made an agreement and now." (case 10, telephone, July, 2018)

General manager "(…) Alpha has changed the strategy and the processes. And have started again with commercial discussions, this means we are not happy with the current situation. We can say, when we see the whole process, from when we started until now. Our feeling is that we have not a reliable partner. It sounds hard. But that is our feeling which we have, and we are working together on this issue to solve it." (case 10, telephone, July, 2018)

Again it has to be mentioned that the account manager perceives a Foxtrot as reliable, this is also valid regarding the perceived supplier support. The general manager is dissatisfied about the received support, however he also recognized that Lima has to improve internally the cooperation in order to improve the relationship. Both actors perceive that after the change in strategy price was the main criteria to select a supplier.

General manager "(…)Later on, they had a new strategy, then pricing was the main criteria. Then they decided to do business elsewhere." (case 10, telephone, July, 2018)

Therefore, they perceive that Alpha is not satisfied with the profitablity of the relationship. Regarding the perceived flexibility the account manager is satisfied with Foxtrot, where the general manager didn't answered this question.

As mentioned the accountmanager from Lima is satisfied with Foxtrot as illustrated in figure 13. Where the general manager is unsatisfied about the relationship with the buyers perspective.
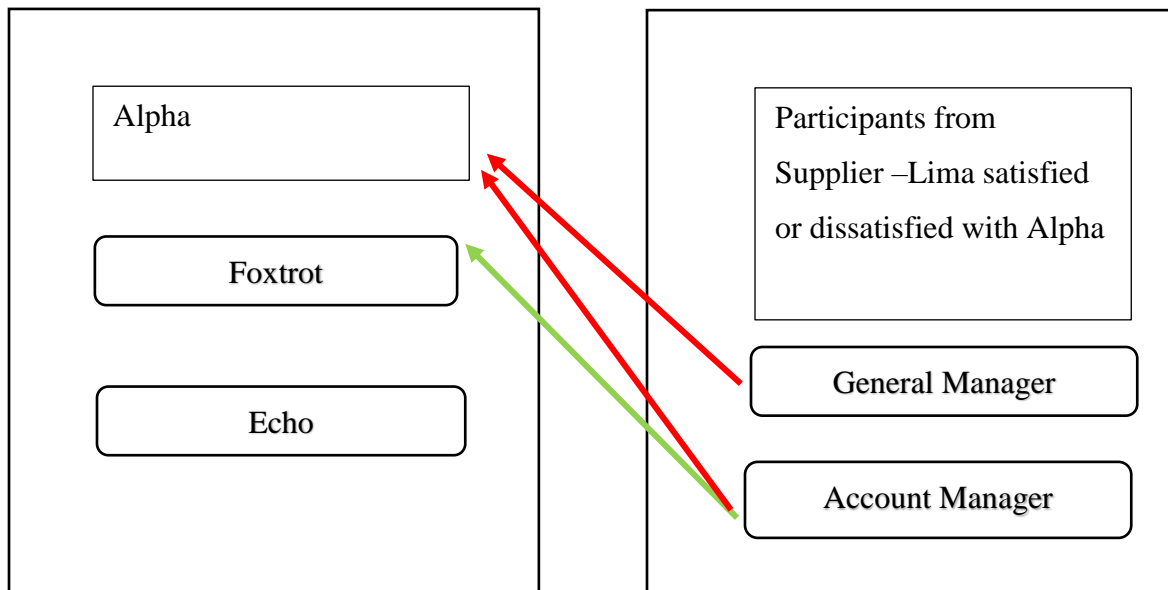
Figure 13 Satisfaction overview from Lima regarding Alpha

The dissatisfaction of Lima is caused by a change in strategy and the participants perceive that decision-making is unclear and diffused at the buyers side.

Accountmanager "(…) As long as its new business from other market groups at Alpha, then it's very diffused for me, and confused. Who makes the decisions, and why they make the decisions." (case9, telephone, July, 2018)

The expectation which the supplier Lima had is not fulfilled, they expected more of this relationship. The expected more revenue and openess from the buyers perspective, in addition they perceive it as difficult to establish a partnership with the buyers side in general. To conlcude the supplier Lima is satisfied with a specifc business unit, but unsatisfied about the relationship in general.

The structure of the buyers organisation leads to observable differences between the business units from the Lima their point of view. Furthermore, the interviewed participants have a different opinion about the perceived relationship. The difference is created by that both participants have experience with a specific business unit. Additionally, the account manager stated that he is worried that the postivie relationship with a specific business units gets

negatively affected by other business units. Finally, the general manager is hopefull to come to a partnership in the future, with clear and open discussions.

4.2.6 Kilo is satisfied with Alpha, despite of delay in decision-making at the buyer's perspective.

Likewise, as India only one actor from Kilo has been interviewed, as shown in table 11.

Company	Respondent's position	Employees	Language interview	Native language respondent
Kilo	Account team leader	50-100	English	unknown

Table11: Supplier overview Kilo

From the Account team leader's perspective trust, customer satisfaction and communication are the most important aspects within a buyer-supplier relationship. According to the respondent a supplier is satisfied when the customer is satisfied, while the supplier can generate profit and when there are growth opportunities.

The respondent is satisfied with the offered growth opportunities, but he mentioned that growth opportunities are limited. On the second place the respondent does not regard innovation possibilities as antecedent, since the supplier only provides the service. On the third place, the respondent is satisfied with the processes and planning, however he stated that there is a lot of delay regarding decision-making.

Account team leader "(…) the answer on beforehand is 'sorry we don't have time" (case 11, personal communication, July, 2018)

Regarding reliability and supplier support the respondent is very satisfied. In terms of profitability for the buyer, the respondent is not aware if the buyer is satisfied or dissatisfied. Nonetheless the respondent perceives that Alpha is target oriented. On the last place the respondent was satisfied with the perceived flexibility of Alpha, but it has to be mentioned that

no or limited explanation was given. As shown in figure 14 Kilo is satisfied with the relationship with Alpha.
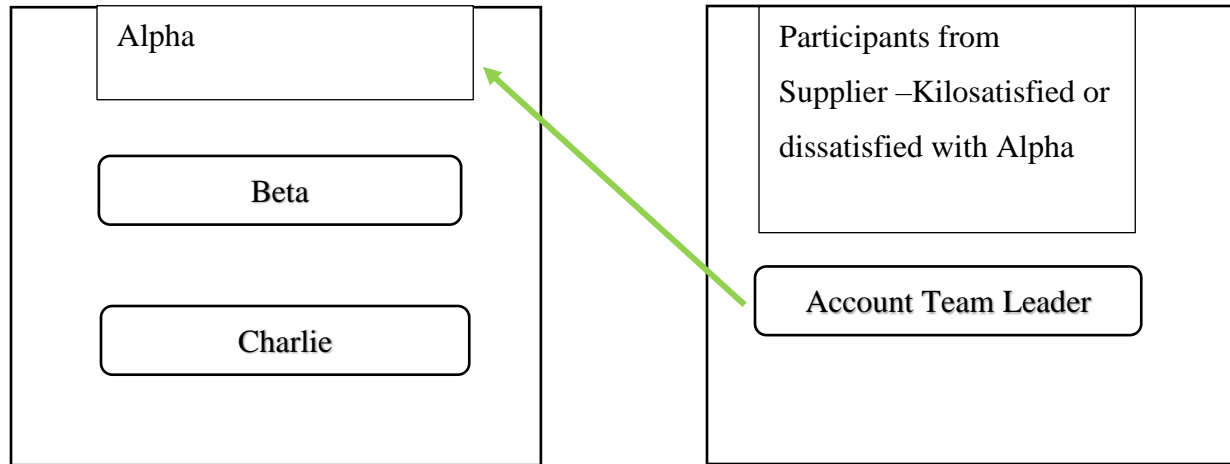
Figure 14 Satisfaction overview from Kilo's perspective regarding Alpha.

To summarize the respondent is satisfied about the relationship regarding, trust, communication and supplier support. Even though, that growth opportunities are limited and that the respondent is not satisfied with the perceived response time in decision-making.

Accouont team leader"(..)I think from my experience, Alpha is in terms of communication, really one of the best customers, that I had a chance to work with. Really clear and transparent communication. But the only point of improvement, what I see, is a bit more quicker response, to the tentative to the means of the supplier" (case 11, personal communication, July, 2018)

Regarding the different business units the account team leader stated that he is equally satisfied with the business units. He percieves that his colleagues at Kilo experience the relationship with Alpha in a similar way. An occurred conflict within the relationship was caused due to a misunderstanding and a lack of transparency. As a point for improvement he mentioned the response time of the buyer. Finally, Alpha has fulfilled the expectation of Kilo regarding sales volume. However, they didn't fullfilled the expectation of Kilo yet to produce products which are meeting Kilo their core business.

4.3. Cross-case analysis – to determine if there are differences between what the buyer and supplier perceive.

To start with from a general point of view the different actors of each supplier perceive a different constructs as most important aspect within the buyer-supplier relationship. As a consequence, the different actors also indicated different constructs as when they are satisfied as a supplier. Participants from the buyer's perspective also perceive different constructs as most important within the buyer-supplier relationship. Nonetheless, from a buyer's perspective it is assumed that profitability serves as a base in order to satisfy a supplier.

4.3.1 No major perceptual differences between the actors of Golf and Alpha

There is a different on how both perspectives perceive the relationship, as described in 4.1.2 the business units at Alpha have a different perception about the relationship. Charlie perceives it as a good and open relationship, while the other business units perceive it less positive due to issues related to pricing and on time delivery. From the other perspective Golf perceives it as a good relationship. In general, there seems to be no or a few perception differences between how both perspectives perceive the measured constructs of supplier satisfaction.

4.3.2 The expectations of the supplier Hotel are perceived to be fulfilled, confirmed by both the supplier's and buyers' perspective

To start with as described in 4.1.3. there are differences between how satisfied the business units are with the supplier Hotel. Nonetheless, the business units believe that they fulfilled the expectations of Hotel. Hotel stated from their perspective that Alpha fulfilled their expectations. A difference between Delta and the supplier is the reliability. Where the business unit regard the supplier as not reliable, the supplier regards the buyer's side as reliable. The actor's perceptions from both sides are similar regarding; growth opportunities, supplier support, innovation possibilities and relational behaviour. In addition, Hotel indicates that they have a positive feeling about the relationship, while a specific business unit is worried about the relationship due to the profitability on the supplier side.

4.3.3 Perceptual distance between Alpha and India regarding 'operative excellence'

The main difference between both perspectives is how both perspectives perceive the operative excellence. Where the buyers side believes that the supplier is dissatisfied about the operations, the supplier indicates that they are capable enough to deal with the decentralized operations. Moreover, the buyers believe that they supplier is not satisfied with the support which the supplier receives, however the supplier perceives it as a mutual cooperation with support from the buyer perspective.

4.3.4 Alpha perceives that Juliet is satisfied with the offered innovation possibilities, while Juliet is not interested in innovation possibilities

Between the involved persons in the relationship between the buyer and Juliet, there are no perceived major differences between how satisfied both perspectives are. One difference is that the buyer's perspective believe that the supplier is satisfied with the offered opportunities for innovation possibilities. In contradiction, the supplier doesn't regard innovation possibilities as antecedent in order to be satisfied, since the buyer is in this case the designer of the product and the supplier only provides a service. Both parties perceive that there is room for improvement regarding the operative excellence, this includes quality, on-time delivery and improvement in communication. Finally, both perspectives believe that the expectation of the supplier is fulfilled.

4.3.5 Lima recognises the growth opportunities, while Alpha believes that Lima is dissatisfied about the growth opportunities

Regarding the relationship between Alpha and Lima there are some observed differences with-in both perspectives. As mentioned from both within-analyses, Lima is satisfied with Foxtrot unit and dissatisfied about the relationship in general. A difference between both perspectives is that Alpha perceives that the Lima is dissatisfied about the growth opportunities, however Lima recognizes the potential and is satisfied about the growth opportunities. Finally, both perspectives perceive that the expectation of the supplier is not fulfilled.

4.3.6 Kilo perceives that 'operative excellence' can be improved, while Alpha perceives that Kilo is satisfied

To start with Kilo pointed out that there is room for improvement regarding response time in decision-making, while both business units at Alpha perceives that Kilo is satisfied with the operative excellence. Both perspectives believe that the expectations of the supplier are fulfilled. As mentioned from the buyer's perspective Kilo is perceived differently as other interviewed suppliers Therefore answers given by the buyer's perspective are limited and not elaborated.

4.3.7 Conclusion, results indicate that perceptual distance is limited regarding 'supplier satisfaction' within a buyer-supplier relationship

A description of the perceived similarities and differences regarding 'supplier satisfaction' within and between the buyer's and supplier's perspective are given in this chapter. As observed perception differences can occur within either the buyer or supplier's organisation are between both parties. Even though that in some cases 'perceptual distance' occurred, considering the amount of analysed data it can be stated that observations of perception differences are limited. In most cases the perceptions of the interviewed actors were in alignment with their colleagues or with their peers from the other perspective. Furthermore, results do not indicate that a conflict occurred in the relationship, caused by 'perceptual distance'.

5. New insights regarding supplier satisfaction from a dyadic view and limitations of the research

In this chapter the findings of the master thesis are discussed. Furthermore, the contribution the existing literature, managerial implications, limitations and future research recommendations are pointed out.

5.1. Discussion: Social identification in organisational context as explanation for 'perceptual distance'

As presented in chapter 4, in some cases 'perceptual distance' occurred, however observations regarding 'perceptual distance' are limited. In this section the observed 'perceptual differences' between or within teams and organisations are pointed out. Additionally, a possible explanation for the described 'perceptual distance' is given based upon the concept of 'social identification in organisations'. The first description and explanation are the case of Lima, Lima is highly dissatisfied about the relationship in general with Alpha., however the account manager, which is employed at the location B of Lima, is satisfied about the relationship with Foxtrot, this is supported by the following quote

Account manager "(...) to complete this. You have contact with that market group, with your findings. But I have already a pretty good relationship, with the main turnover market group at our side" (case 9, skype, July, 2018)

Therefore, it is assumed that the account manager identifies himself on 'team' B level regarding their relationship with Foxtrot and on 'organisation' level between both organisations as a whole. This is confirmed by Foxtrot which perceived that the plant of Lima in B is satisfied with Foxtrot. Furthermore, both actors from Lima are satisfied from 'organisational' level regarding the growth opportunities provided by Alpha, while Foxtrot and Echo from 'organisation level' as perceived that Lima is dissatisfied.

Secondly, 'perceptual distance' between employees at the same organisation occurred in the case of Golf. In the case of 'Golf' the sales manager perceives innovation possibilities not as an antecedent for 'supplier satisfaction', while the operations manager is satisfied with the offered innovation possibilities. The difference might be created that both employees have a different

function within Golf, hence different interests. This is in alignment with that identification with different foci are sources for conflict. Since both actors are assumed to identify themselves from occupational level, hence the norms from the respective foci (occupational level) are assumed to be followed.[133]

A Tirth, 'perceptual distance' occurred between Juliet and Alpha. The interviewed actors from Alpha perceived that Alpha is satisfied with the innovation possibilities, while actors at Juliet stated that they are not interested in 'innovation possibilities. This difference might be explained from 'organisational' level, since Alpha is an organisation that provides technical solutions and therefore is interested in innovation, therefore it is assumed that it is Alpha's norm to innovate. While Juliet self-categorise them as a service provider.

This is supported by the following quote with the sales manager "(...)

Question: Are you satisfied with the innovation possibilities Alpha offers?

Answer: Innovation possibilities? No, we make a product for you. According to your design, we are just manufacturing for Alpha. And Alpha makes the innovation and not us." (case 12, skype, July, 2018)

From this perspective actors at Alpha might perceive innovation possibilities as antecedent, while not knowing if the supplier is interested in 'innovation possibilities'. By not being aware the norms of each other perspectives, a contradiction between buyer and supplier occurred on organisational level.[134]

A fourth, observed perception difference, occurred between Alpha and India, which that the buyer's perspective believes that India is dissatisfied about the operative excellence and supplier support, while India is satisfied with the buyer's operative excellence and supplier support. However, none of the participants mentioned a specific explanation for the observed perceptual distance between India and Alpha evaluation. It is assumed that the participants from Alpha perceive that they are giving 'less' attention and support to India than compared to other suppliers.

---

[133] See Van Dick(2001), p. 271
[134] See Van Dick(2001), p. 271

Based upon the three above described observations and presented data in chapter 4 (possible) perceptual differences related to supplier satisfaction between a buyer and supplier, might be created due to that actors within or between organisations identify themselves on a different level, namely 1) team or location 2) organisation 3) occupation. The three identified levels serve as an explanation for why actors perceive 'supplier satisfaction' similarly or differently. Similarities and differences in perception regarding 'supplier satisfaction' can occur between the buyer's and supplier's perspective or within either the supplier's or buyer's perspective. Furthermore, the cognitive dimension, the actor's awareness of being a member of a group, influences the affective, evaluative and behavioural dimensions as presented in table 2.[135] To conclude in this thesis it is assumed that 'supplier satisfaction' and the identified antecedents for supplier satisfaction are influenced by the actor's 'cognitive' awareness of belonging to a certain group, which are 1) organisation 2) team and 3) occupation.

5.2 Contribution to existing literature: fulfilment of supplier's expectations dependent on 'identification'

As mentioned at the beginning of this study the stated research question is "how is supplier satisfaction perceived, from employees involved in a purchasing function, from a buyer and its key suppliers' perspective(s)?" Data collected within this research contributed to new insights into the concept of supplier satisfaction. The gathered data regarding the relationship between Alpha and Lima provided a finding where the supplier is satisfied with a specific business unit, while the supplier is dissatisfied with the relationship with the buyer as whole organisation in general. This finding contributes to the observed gap in the literature by if supplier satisfaction is established between entire organisations or employees and their peers.[136] As discussed earlier it is assumed that an actor within either the buyer's or supplier's perspective can be satisfied from 1) organisational 2) team or subunit 3) occupational level. A second contribution is that the relationship between Hotel and the business units Beta and Delta showed, that a supplier can be satisfied with the buyer, while the supplier is dissatisfied about the profitability.[137] However, when this situation occurs, this eventually might result negatively the customer attractiveness of

---

[135] See Van Dick et al. (2005), "p. 192-193"
136 See Hüttinger et al. (2012), p.1204
137 See Vos et al. (2016), p. 4621

the buyer and has therefore to be solved in order to satisfy the supplier. A third contribution to existing literature 'is that 'operative excellence' should be measured at business unit level, when the supplier's perspective serves multiple business units from the buyer's perspective. As observed in this research when the buyer's perspective has an organisational structure with autonomous business units, it is assumed that efficiency of how operations are managed are dependent on team / subunit level and not organisational level as a whole.[138] A fourth contribution to existing literature is that the observations in this master study enriches our understanding of 'supplier satisfaction' and potential perceptions gaps within a buyer-supplier relationship. As described in chapter four in some cases 'perceptual distance' occurred, however observations of 'perceptual distance' were limited. As mentioned at the beginning of this master thesis, perception gaps are relevant for investigation, due to that perception gaps can provide sources for misunderstanding. These misunderstandings eventually might lead to a dissatisfied partner or termination of the relationship by that partner.[139] The findings of this master thesis indicate that 'perceptual distance' is limited regarding 'supplier satisfaction' in a buyer-supplier relationship. Perceptual distance can occur within the same organisation or between organisations. Furthermore, none of the findings indicate that the participants in this study, their dissatisfaction is caused by perception gaps. There was one supplier namely, Lima, which was very dissatisfied. The dissatisfaction of Lima is mainly driven by their perception that Alpha changed their strategy, therefore Lima does not regard Alpha as a reliable partner. Unfortunately, in most cases participants couldn't explain how they believed that perceptions differences were created. Furthermore, the occurred conflicts can be regarded as cognitive conflicts as, since these conflicts were related to the tasks and performance of certain actors. No conflicts occurred due to perceptual distance in this case study.[140]

5.3 Managerial implications: Identifying 'perceptual distance' and improving 'perceptual alignment' due to 'social identification in organisation settings'.

By linking 'social identification in organisational settings' to the concept of 'supplier satisfaction', the buyer's perspective should be aware who they are trying to satisfy in order to become eventually a 'preferred customer'. Since it's assumed from a 'SIT' perspective than an

---

138 See Hüttinger et al. (2014), p. 703
139 See Praxmer-Carus et al. (2013), p. 203
140 See Rahim (2002), p. 211

actor at the supplier's perspective can be satisfied from 1) organisational 2) team / subunit or 3) occupational level. Taking into consideration that supplier satisfaction can be described as 'the buyer's ability to live up the expectations of the supplier.' Both buyer and supplier can benefit from this finding, by aligning expectations on the identified levels. Furthermore, both buyer and supplier can benefit from 'social identification in organisational settings' in order to identify if there is 'perceptual distance' or 'perceptual alignment' between or within the buyer's and supplier's perspective. In order to identify 'perceptual distance' or 'perceptual alignment' organisations need to evaluate if the involved actors in the buyer-supplier relationship are satisfied or dissatisfied from 1) organisational 2) team / subunit or 3) occupational level.

5.4 The main recommendation for future research is to integrate social identification in organisational settings into the concept of supplier satisfaction

As stated earlier the explanation for (potential) perception differences regarding supplier satisfaction has not been empirically tested. Therefore, a recommendation for future research is to integrate the concept of 'social identification in organisational settings' into supplier satisfaction E.g. in the tools to measure supplier satisfaction a delineation can be made if the participants are satisfied from a team, organisational or occupational level. Due to the unique situation where Lima is satisfied with a specific business unit, but dissatisfied about the relationship with Alpha. A recommendation for future research is to determine if suppliers are equally satisfied with each business unit, when the supplier serves multiple business units from the buyer's perspective. A third, recommendation for future research is to study if there are significant differences between how suppliers from different culture perceive supplier satisfaction. This recommendation is based upon the findings of the case Juliet where findings indicates that their culture influences their approach towards customers. A fourth, recommendation is to research what the influence of centralized or decentralized of operating activities is on supplier satisfaction. While most actors indicated that it's the supplier responsibility to cope with decentralized activities, an actor of Hotel indicated that decentralized operating activities were inconvenient for him. Since it is assumed that for a supplier it's more convenient to efficiently manage the operations when there is a high degree of centralization at the buyer's perspective.

6.3 Limitations of the research

To begin with, as mentioned earlier the concept of 'social identification in organisational context' was not included in the interview guide and thus only provided a theoretical explanation. Even though, that cognition and perception are highly related and influence each other, cognition and perception are not the same.[141] Where perception refers to the process of how actor's interpret the world.[142] On the other hand the 'cognitive' dimension in 'social identification in organisational settings' refers to an actor's knowledge belonging to a certain group.[143] Which eventually influences normative behaviour, positive ingroup attitudes and cohesion, collective behaviour, shared norms, mutual influence.[144] Therefore the explanation for why the interviewed actor's evaluate 'supplier satisfaction' differently could be considered as a 'cognitive' difference rather than 'perceptual distance'. Furthermore, a second limitation of this research is the cross-language setting of the research. The interviewed participants were interviewed in English and Dutch, to emphasise English was only for one participant his native language. The literature regarding cross-language research recommends using an independent translator to validate translations in the interview guide and transcription, this also ensures credibility and confirmability.[145] A third limitation is that not all actors gave an elaborate explanation regarding the measured constructs of supplier satisfaction on how they perceived the relationship. A fourth limitation is that for each business unit at the buyer's perspective only one actor was interviewed. Therefore, it was not possible to compare results within teams at the buyer's perspective. Fifthly, from India and Kilo only one actor was interviewed, therefore it was not possible to compare results with other actors at those organisations. Another limitation might be that some participants gave socially desirable answers, this due to the culture and that interviews took place from the buyer's perspective. Even though, that the researcher emphasized that results and data would be treated confidentially and anonymized. A seventh limitation is that there is already a wide availability of concepts within the literature stream of supplier satisfaction, and that not all constructs could be researched this due that the duration of the interview would otherwise be extremely long. An eight limitation is that power, dependency,

---

[141] See Tacca (2011), p.1
[142] See Gibson et al. (2009), p. 63
[143] See Van Dick et al. (2005), "p. 192-193"
[144] See Hogg and Terry (2000), p. 123
[145] See Squires (2009), p. 282

trust and other factors that influence the buyer-supplier relationship were not included in the interview guide nor the research model. The ninth limitation is that the supplier perspective was asked on them believe if the buyer was satisfied with the offered price, this is not in alignment with the construct of 'profitability'.[146] A final limitation as with most qualitative studies is the replicability, generalizability, subjectivity and lack of transparency.[147]

---

[146] See Vos et al.(2016), p. 4614
[147] See Bryman and Bell (2015), "p. 399-401"

References

Aira, M., Kauhanen, J., Larivaara, P., & Rautio, P. (2003). Factors influencing inquiry about patients' alcohol consumption by primary health care physicians: Qualitative semi-structured interview study. *Family Practice*, *20*(3), 270–275. https://doi.org/10.1093/fampra/cmg307

Amason, A. C. (1996). Distinguishing the effects of functional and dysfunctional conflict on strategic decision making: Resolving a paradox for top management teams. *Academy of Management Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2307/256633

Barriball, L. K., & While, A. (1994). Collecting data using a semi- structured interview: a discussion paper. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, *19*(2), 328–335. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01088.x

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). *Qualitative Case Study Meth odology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers*. *The Qualitative Report*. https://doi.org/10.2174/1874434600802010058

Baxter, R. (2012). How can business buyers attract sellers' resources?. Empirical evidence for preferred customer treatment from suppliers. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *41*(8), 1249–1258. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2012.10.009

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2015). *Business Research Methods*. *Social Research*. https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857028044

Chang, K. H., & Gotcher, D. F. (2010). Conflict-coordination learning in marketing channel relationships: The distributor view. *Industrial Marketing Management*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2008.10.003

Chen, Y. S., Su, H. C., & Ro, Y. K. (2016). Can I read your mind? Perception gaps in supply chain relationships. *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, *22*(4), 311–324. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pursup.2016.06.006

Cohen, D., & Crabtree, B. (2006). Semi-structured Interviews Recording Semi-Structured interviews. *Qualitative Research Guidelines Project*, 2. Retrieved from http://www.qualres.org/HomeSemi-3629.html

Cristiana B, Gibson; Jay, Conger; Cecily, C. (2001). Perceptual distance: the impact of differences in team lader and member perceptions across cultures. *Advances in Global Leadership*, *2*, 245–279. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S1535-1203(01)02122-0

Cropanzano, R. (2005). Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review. *Journal of Management*, *31*(6), 874–900. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279602

Eisikovits, Z., & Koren, C. (2010). Approaches to and outcomes of dyadic interview analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, *20*(12), 1642–1655. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732310376520

Essig, M., & Amann, M. (2009). Supplier satisfaction: Conceptual basics and explorative findings. *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, *15*(2), 103–113. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pursup.2009.01.001

Gale, N. K., Heath, G., Cameron, E., Rashid, S., & Redwood, S. (2013). Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-13-117

Gibson, C. B., Cooper, C. D., & Conger, J. A. (2009). Do You See What We See? The Complex Effects of Perceptual Distance Between Leaders and Teams. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013073

Griffith, D. A., Harvey, M. G., & Lusch, R. F. (2006). Social exchange in supply chain relationships: The resulting benefits of procedural and distributive justice. *Journal of Operations Management*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jom.2005.03.003

Hald, K. S. (2012). The role of boundary spanners in the formation of customer attractiveness. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *41*(8), 1228–1240. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2012.10.007

Hald, K. S., Cordón, C., & Vollmann, T. E. (2009). Towards an understanding of attraction in buyer-supplier relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *38*(8), 960–970. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2008.04.015

Harris, L. C., O'Malley, L., & Patterson, M. (2003). Professional interaction: Exploring the concept of attraction. *Marketing Theory*, *3*(1), 9–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593103003001002

Hasson, H., von Thiele Schwarz, U., Nielsen, K., & Tafvelin, S. (2016). Are We All in the Same Boat? The Role of Perceptual Distance in Organizational Health Interventions. In *Stress and Health*. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2703

Hätönen, J., & Eriksson, T. (2009). 30+ years of research and practice of outsourcing - Exploring the past and anticipating the future. *Journal of International Management*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2008.07.002

Hogg, M. A. (2000). Social Identity and Social Comparison. In *Handbook of Social Comparison*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-4237-7_19

Hogg, M. A., Abrams, D., Otten, S., & Hinkle, S. (2004). The social identity perspective: Intergroup relations, self-conception, and small groups. *Small Group Research*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496404263424

Hogg, M. A., & Terry, D. J. (2000). Social identity and self-categorization processes in organizational contexts. *Academy of Management Review*. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2000.2791606

Hornsey, M. J. (2008). Social Identity Theory and Self-categorization Theory: A Historical Review. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00066.x

Hovmøller Mortensen, M., Vagn Freytag, P., & Stentoft Arlbjørn, J. (2008). Attractiveness in

supply chains: a process and matureness perspective. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, *38*(10), 799–815. https://doi.org/10.1108/09600030810926501

Hüttinger, L., Schiele, H., & Schröer, D. (2014a). Exploring the antecedents of preferential customer treatment by suppliers: a mixed methods approach. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1108/SCM-06-2014-0194

Hüttinger, L., Schiele, H., & Schröer, D. (2014b). Exploring the antecedents of preferential customer treatment by suppliers: a mixed methods approach. *Supply Chain Management: An International Journal*, *19*(5/6), 697–721. https://doi.org/10.1108/SCM-06-2014-0194

Hüttinger, L., Schiele, H., & Veldman, J. (2012). The drivers of customer attractiveness, supplier satisfaction and preferred customer status: A literature review. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *41*(8), 1194–1205. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2012.10.004

Jonsson, P., & Zineldin, M. (2003). Achieving high satisfaction in supplier-dealer working relationships. *Supply Chain Management*. https://doi.org/10.1108/13598540310484627

Kong, D. T. (2015). Narcissists' negative perception of their counterpart's competence and benevolence and their own reduced trust in a negotiation context. *Personality and Individual Differences*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.10.015

La Rocca, A., Caruana, A., & Snehota, I. (2012). Measuring customer attractiveness. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *41*(8), 1241–1248. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2012.10.008

Leung, L. (2015). Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*. https://doi.org/10.4103/2249-4863.161306

Marshall, S. L., & While, A. E. (1994). Interviewing respondents who have English as a second language: challenges encountered and suggestions for other researchers. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01122.x

Maunu, S. (2003). *Supplier satisfaction: The concept and a measurement system; a study to define the supplier satisfaction elements and usage as a management tool*. University of Oulu.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. *Qualitative Data Analysis A Methods Sourcebook*.

Newton, N. (2010). Exploring Qualitative Methods: The use of semi-structured interviews. *Exploring Qualitative Methods*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1037/e546562006-001

Nollet, J., Rebolledo, C., & Popel, V. (2012). Becoming a preferred customer one step at a time. *Industrial Marketing Management*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2012.10.003

Pulles, N. J., Schiele, H., Veldman, J., & Hüttinger, L. (2016). The impact of customer attractiveness and supplier satisfaction on becoming a preferred customer. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *54*, 129–140. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.06.004

Rahim, M. A. (2002). Toward a theory of managing organizational conflict. *International*

Journal of Conflict Management. https://doi.org/10.1108/eb022874

Sarkar, A., & Mohapatra, P. K. J. (2006). Evaluation of supplier capability and performance: A method for supply base reduction. *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, *12*(3), 148–163. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pursup.2006.08.003

Schiele, H., Calvi, R., & Gibbert, M. (2012). Customer attractiveness, supplier satisfaction and preferred customer status: Introduction, definitions and an overarching framework. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *41*(8), 1178–1185. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2012.10.002

Schiele, H., Veldman, J., & Hüttinger, L. (2011). Supplier innovativeness and supplier pricing: the role of preferred customer status. *International Journal of Innovation Management*. https://doi.org/10.1142/S1363919611003064

Snavely, W. B. (1981). The impact of social style upon person perception in primary relationships. *Communication Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463378109369398

Squires, A. (2009). Methodological challenges in cross-language qualitative research: A research review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2008.08.006

Steinle, C., & Schiele, H. (2008). Limits to global sourcing?. Strategic consequences of dependency on international suppliers: Cluster theory, resource-based view and case studies. *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pursup.2008.01.001

Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870

Stuart, I., McCutcheon, D., Handfield, R., McLachlin, R., & Samson, D. (2002). Effective case research in operations management: A process perspective. *Journal of Operations Management*. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-6963(02)00022-0

Swanborn, P. (2010). What is a case study? *Case Study Research: What, Why and How?* https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803123.004

Tacca, M. C. (2011). Commonalities between perception and cognition. *Frontiers in Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2011.00358

Tan, K. C., Handfield, R. B., & Krause, D. R. (1998). Enhancing the firm's performance through quality and supply base management: An empirical study. *International Journal of Production Research*, *36*(10), 2813–2837. https://doi.org/10.1080/002075498192490

Tanskanen, K., & Aminoff, A. (2015). Buyer and supplier attractiveness in a strategic relationship - a dyadic multiple-case study. *Industrial Marketing Management*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2015.04.011

Terpend, R., Tyler, B. B., Krause, D. R., & Handfield, R. B. (2008). Buyer-supplier relationships: Derived value over two decades. *Journal of Supply Chain Management*. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-493X.2008.00053.x

Tóth, Z., Thiesbrummel, C., Henneberg, S. C., & Naudé, P. (2015). Understanding configurations of relational attractiveness of the customer firm using fuzzy set QCA. *Journal of Business Research*, *68*(3), 723–734. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2014.07.010

Van Dick, R. (2001). Identification in organizational contexts: Linking theory and research from social and organizational psychology. *International Journal of Management Reviews*. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2370.00068

Van Dick, R., Wagner, U., Stellmacher, J., Christ, O., & Tissington, P. A. (2005). To be(long) or not to be(long): Social identification in organizational contexts. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*. https://doi.org/10.3200/MONO.131.3.189-218

Vos, F. G. S., Schiele, H., & Hüttinger, L. (2016). Supplier satisfaction: Explanation and out-of-sample prediction. *Journal of Business Research*, *69*(10), 4613–4623. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.013

Wong, A. (2000). Integrating supplier satisfaction with customer satisfaction. *Total Quality Management*. https://doi.org/10.1080/09544120050007733

Yang, I. (2015). Perceived conflict avoidance by managers and its consequences on subordinates' attitudes. *Business Ethics*. https://doi.org/10.1111/beer.12083

Yang, I., & Li, L. M. (2018). 'It is not fair that you do not know we have problems': Perceptual distance and the consequences of male leaders' conflict avoidance behaviours. *European Management Journal*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2017.03.013

Appendix A – Interview guide

<u>Interview structure: for actors from the buyer's perspective:</u>

-Purpose of the interview and expression of gratitude for the participants taking part in the interview.

-Permission for audio recording the interview.

-You have the right not to answer a question and to stop the interview at any time

-Data will be treated confidentially and anonymized

-Allowance to record the interview

-Validation of transcript

First part: what they buyer perceive as important for supplier satisfaction in general: (opening segments)

- What is your role within the buyers-supplier relationship?
- Wat is jouw rol binnen de buyer-supplier relatie?
- What is in your opinion the most important aspect in the buyer-supplier relationship?
- Wat is naar jouw mening het belangrijkste aspect binnen de buyer-supplier relatie?
- When is a supplier satisfied according to you?
- Wanneer is een leverancier tevreden volgens jou?

Second part: Perceived relationship. This type of questions are in general, if you want to point out a specific supplier it's up to the interviewee

- How do you perceive the relationship you have with your suppliers?
- Hoe ervaar jij de relatie die je hebt met jouw leveranciers?
- How do you believe that your suppliers are perceiving the relationship?
- Hoe denk jij dat jouw leveranciers de relatie ervaren?
- How do you believe the relationship can be improved with the suppliers?
- Hoe denk je dat de relatie verbetert kan worden?

On a scale of 1 to 10:   1 = very dissatisfied   10= very satisfied   for each supplier specific

Constructs extracted from the literature:

- 1. Do you perceive that your suppliers are satisfied with the growth opportunities you offer?
- Denk je dat jouw leveranciers tevreden zijn met de groeimogelijkheden die Alpha aanbiedt?
- 2. Do you perceive that your suppliers are satisfied with the innovation possibilities you offer?
- Denk je dat jouw leveranciers tevreden zijn met de innovatie mogelijkheden die je aanbiedt?
- 3. Do you perceive that your suppliers are satisfied with your operative excellence you provide? (efficiency regarding planning, processes and decision-making)
- Denk je dat jouw leveranciers tevreden zijn met de operations die je levert?
- 4. Do you perceive your suppliers as a reliable (in terms of made agreements) partner?
- Ervaar jij jouw leveranciers als reliable?
- 5. Do you perceive that you are helping your suppliers in order to improve performance?
- Ervaar jij dat je leveranciers helpt om de performance te verbeteren?
- 6. Do you perceive that your suppliers contribute to your profitability?
- Ervaar jij dat je leveranciers bijdragen aan je profitability?
- 7. Do you perceive your supplier as flexible?
- Ervaar jij leveranciers als flexible?
- 8. Are you satisfied with your suppliers?
- Ben je tevreden met je leveranciers?

Questions added later and asked after suppliers were interviewed:

- 9. Do you perceive that supplier is satisfied with Alpha their reliability?
- 10. Do you perceive that supplier is satisfied with the profitability of the relationship?
- 11. Do you perceive that supplier is satisfied with the flexibility of the relationship?
- 12. Do you perceive that supplier is satisfied with the relationship

Third part: perception (middle segment)

- How do you think your colleagues within the business unit perceive the relationship with the suppliers?
- Hoe denk jij dat jouw collega's binnen de business unit de relatie ervaren met de leveranciers?
- Do you perceive that there are major differences regarding the quality of the relationship with different suppliers?

- Ervaar jij dat er grote verschillen zitten in de relatie betreffende de kwaliteit van de relaties met verschillende leveranciers?
- How do you believe that (possible) perception differences are created?
  Hoe denk jij dat (mogelijke) perceptie verschillen ontstaan?

- What kind of conflicts did you experienced with suppliers, if any?
- If so reason? How handled?
- Wat voor een soort conflicten heb je ervaren met leveranciers, indien van toepassing?
-

Closing questions of the interview: (concluding segment)

- Do you believe that you fulfilled the expectations which the supplier had at the beginning of the relationship?
- Denk je dat aan de verwachtingen van de leveranciers, die de leverancier aan het begin van de relatie, hebt voldaan?
- How do you believe the relationship with your suppliers changed during time?
- Hoe denk je dat relatie gedurende tijd is veranderd?
- Anything else you want to add regarding supplier satisfaction?
- Is er iets anders dat je toe wilt voegen betreffende supplier satisfaction?
- Anything else you want to add regarding the perceived relationship between you and the suppliers?
- Is er iets anders dat je wilt toevoegen betreffende hoe je de relatie ervaart met de leveranciers?

Interview structure: for actors from the supplier's perspective:

-Purpose of the interview and expression of gratitude for the participants taking part in the interview.

-Permission for audio recording the interview.

-You have the right not to answer a question and to stop the interview at any time

-Data will be treated confidentially and anonymized

-Allowance to record the interview

-Validation of transcript

First part: what they supplier perceive as important for supplier satisfaction in general: (opening segments)

- What is your role within the buyers-supplier relationship?
- What is in your opinion the most important aspect in the buyer-supplier relationship?
- If you have to identify yourself into one of the following competitive strategies; operational excellence, customer intimacy and product leadership, which one describes you as best?
- When are you as a supplier satisfied?

Second part – Perceived relationship with buyer. This type of questions are general questions, if you want to point out a specific business group it's up to the interviewee

- How do you perceive the relationship you have with Alpha?
- How do you believe that Alpha is perceiving the relationship?
- How do you believe the relationship can be improved with the Alpha?

    Constructs extracted from the literature:

On a scale of 1 to 10:   1 = very dissatisfied   10= very satisfied

- 1. Are you satisfied with the growth opportunities Alpha offers?
- 2. Are you satisfied with the innovation possibilities Alpha offers?
- 3. Are you satisfied with Alpha their operative excellence (efficiency regarding planning, processes and decision-making)?
- 4. Do you perceive Alpha as a reliable partner (in terms of made agreements) partner?
- 5. Do you perceive that Alpha is helping you in to improve performance?
- 6. Do you perceive that Alpha is satisfied with the price you offer?

- 7. Do you perceive Alpha as flexible?
- 8. Are you satisfied with Alpha as a buyer?

Third part: perception (middle segment)

- Do you perceive that there are major differences regarding the quality of the relationship with the different business units within Alpha?
- How do you think your colleagues within perceive the relationship with Alpha?
- How do you believe that (possible) perception differences are created?
- What kind of conflicts did you experienced with a business unit, if any?

Closing question of the interview: (concluding segment)

- Do you believe that Alpha fulfilled the expectations which you had at the beginning of the relationship?
- How do you believe the relationship with Alpha changed during time?
  - In a positive/negative way?
- Anything else you want to add regarding supplier satisfaction?
- Anything else you want to add regarding the perceived relationship between you and Alpha?
-