

The Mediating Role of Corporate Reputation Embedded in the Assessment of Customer Attractiveness

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ABSTRACT,

In today's economic context in which the number of suppliers has decreased over the recent years, new approaches, such as reverse marketing, emerge in order to counter this trend. In essence, the notion of becoming attractive for a supplier gains importance in research, and in the business environment. Hence, with the objective to elaborate on the concept of customer attractiveness the field of corporate reputation shall expand upon its understanding. In order to gain insight in this topic interviews and surveys have been conducted across industries as well as across sales and purchasing professionals. The findings suggest a strong linkage between both subjects advocating the active management of corporate reputation of an organization as an action to sustain attraction within the supplier pool.

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procurement, supply management, buyer-supplier relationships, ex-ante attractiveness, preferred customer status, corporate reputation, customer attractiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays in the age of outsourcing and global supply chains, there are several circumstances to look out for. One of them is the shrinking supplier base provoking a different mindset when dealing with a buyer-supplier relationship. In essence, with fewer suppliers in the market it resulted in more engagement with those still participating in the marketplace (Cannon & Perreault, p. 439). Furthermore, besides the increased cooperation between buyer and supplier, logically, with a less crowded supplier base, and the efforts of outsourcing led to increased bargaining power on the supplier side (Porter, 1996, pp. 29-30). This is due to low concentration of suppliers, differentiated products, and relatively high switching costs involved when changing the supplier.

When saying the supplier offers a differentiated product it can be argued, it being an innovation owned by the supplier. Through the lens of manufacturing and design, suppliers have the capacity to develop such innovation also valuable to the customer (Azadegan, 2011, p. 49). On the other side, beside developing innovation internally in the supplier's facilities, collaboration between buyer and supplier in pursuit of product development by early supplier involvement becomes a prominent topic to consider (Bozdogan, Deyst, Hoult, & Lucas, p. 163). This in turn means closer collaboration between both parties and an early understanding of the new development process by the supplier. Furthermore, the supplier involved in the process has the capability to enhance the relationship via its innovativeness which leads to higher relationship performance (Jean, Kim, & Sinkovics, 2012, p. 1003). What has to be pointed out in the context of the buyer-supplier relationship and innovation is the need of the supplier to have certain capabilities for project management and collaboration (Smals & Smits, 2011, p. 156). Hence, how the supplier engages in the relationship depends on various capabilities influencing the performance of a project.

In contrast to the level of the buyer-supplier relationship, today's environment in which organizations operate has become more interconnected through technology creating global supply chains stretching worldwide (Meixell & Gargeya, 2005, p. 532). This induces new challenges for businesses in an ever changing environment. In particular major disruptions of the supply chain can have an effect on supply security. For instance, natural hazards across the globe may disrupt the supply chain (Kleindorfer & Saad, 2005, p. 53). These may range from the Kobe earthquake in Japan 1995 to Hurricane Andrew 1992 in Florida. Another factor is political instability causing interruptions in the supply chain. These occurrences of political or natural hazards disrupt the supply chain which in turn has an impact on the firm's profitability (Burke, Carrillo, & Vakharia, p. 95).

Considering the previously mentioned challenges purchasers face in the market, one of the variables contributing to success in handling these issues is the attractiveness of the customer. In the context of the decreasing number of suppliers aforementioned. This

in turn means for customer attractiveness that a mutual attraction becomes key in developing relationships (Hald, Cordon, & Vollmann, 2009, p. 960). The coined term in order to create a mutual attraction is reverse marketing, which focuses on executing marketing actions in order to appeal to suppliers. It is in this case the buyer who tries to convince the supplier to deliver the exact product or service needed from the buying firm (Blenkhorn & Banting, p. 187). To elaborate on that, reverse marketing additionally becomes important when considering customers being dependent on innovation from the supplier, where the reverse marketing approach is a useful tool within the buyer-supplier relationship (Schiele & Vos, 2015, p. 139). In order to adjust the reverse marketing approach in a way which is appealing to suppliers the points most prominently to consider are size, volume, and influence in the respective industry (Makkonen, Vuori, & Puranen, 2016, p. 160). Other factors include the predictability of the firm and its opportunities given through research and development projects.

Besides the importance of fostering the access to innovation from suppliers there is as well a need for securing the supply in an ever changing environment involving political or natural threat. What is important to note in this type of context is to have external integration in organizational processes, while being agile in order to mitigate supply chain disruptions (Braunscheidel & Seidel, p. 120). Contributing to the performance of the supply chain is information sharing (Zhou & Benton, 2007, p. 1348), which in turn functions as an aid in managing the purchasing process as well as in times of supply chain disruption. When linked to customer attractiveness it becomes apparent that suppliers prefer highly attractive customers when being confronted with an uncertain supply situation.

What certainly plays a role when looking at such instances, is corporate reputation of the customer which can be seen as a crucial asset of an organization and even representing a competitive advantage (Dierickx & Cool, p. 1504). In some cases corporate reputation may be related to financial performance (Roberts & Dowling, 2002, p. 1077). Hence, in a situation of financial performance being identified with corporate reputation, the customer attractiveness for a supplier becomes more apparent. What has to be kept in mind is that for corporate reputation there are more factors to be taken into account besides aspects regarding finance.

In this research more importance should be assigned to corporate reputation in a buyer-supplier relationship. With customer attractiveness being well documented there is an identified research gap in regards to the effects of corporate reputation through the lens of customer attractiveness in a buyer-supplier relationship. Therefore, the focus for this research should lie on that component. In case of a successful identification of the influences of corporate reputation on customer attractiveness and how to deal with it, has the potential to extend the knowledge domain around customer attractiveness. This results in the questions to be addressed in this research in order to clarify the aim of it. Thus:

How can a link be established between the concept of the attractiveness of a customer and corporate reputation?

Elaborating on the main research question one may arise with the following question:

Since it is not only about how the company can benefit from their attractiveness and corporate reputation in particular, but also more specific about what did a company do in order to sophisticate their corporate reputation?

With these questions in mind, the approach answering them follows a systematic path. Firstly, it will touch upon the ground of existing literature to provide a framework of the topic. This shall represent the foundation on which the findings can be build. Subsequently, the methodology will be discussed. This embraces the methods used in order to gain the data needed to answer the questions outlined previously. In the following the results will be presented which derive from the collected data. Lastly, a discussion will be outlined encompassing the limitations, reflection, and contribution of this research to the field of supply management and ex-ante attractiveness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Preferred customer cycle

derived from social exchange theory

Several influential factors play a role in influencing the interaction between the buyer and the supplier. However, the focus of this research shall lie on the term of ex-attractiveness alone, and its antecedents. Prior to that a short introduction into the topic of preferred customer is briefly presented.

The preferred customer cycle (Figure 1) derives from the social exchange theory which represents the principle of involvement of a series of interactions resulting in obligations, interactions which are interdependent and contingent on the actions of another person (Cropanzano & Mitchell, p. 874). Out of this principle the preferred customer cycle is construed (Schiele, Calvi, & Gibbert, 2012, p. 1180).

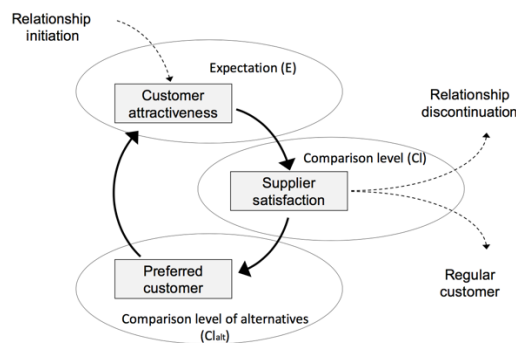


Figure 1: Illustration of the preferred customer cycle in correspondence with social exchange theory

(Schiele, Calvi, & Gibbert, 2012, p. 1180)

As it is being illustrated the relationship initiation serves as the starting point. This leads to the initial expectation of the recent relationship, which is tied

to customer attractiveness. Eventually, it evolves to the comparison level which inherits supplier satisfaction. Important to note here is the fact that this occurs during the relationship, hence, applying a clear distinction between customer attractiveness and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, supplier satisfaction advances into three distinct pathways. The first two being relationship discontinuation and the classification of regular customer and the last being the preferred customer. The latter is tied to the comparison level of alternatives. From there an arrow leads again back to the expectation phase completing the cycle.

2.2 Antecedents of ex-ante attractiveness

The term of ex-ante attractiveness derives from the convergence of the research, which has been conducted so far. Hence, this results in the claim that the customer and its attraction perceived by the supplier, is only as significant as the expectation the supplier has of the relationship with the customer (Schiele, Calvi, & Gibbert, 2012, p. 1178). The conditions which lead to the perception, are the awareness of the existence of the customer as well as the familiarity of the needs of the customer. However, the aspect of awareness is not sufficient, when of positive expectations is not taken account for. All things considered, the term customer attractiveness is an ex-ante construct, and this can be as well termed as ex-ante attractiveness.

The derivation of the ex-attractiveness of a customer is embodied by the social exchange theory, claiming that in particular, initial attraction derives from expectations and beliefs forming the perception of those involved (Mortensen, 2012, p. 1216). The rewarding experience of a relationship between two individuals, if one is attracted to the other by expecting the association is beneficial (Blau, 1964). Thus, what determines the attractiveness of another entity is characterized by expected rewards stemming from the relationship, and in contrast, the costs of being involved (Homans, 1958, p. 597). The attraction is based on expectations, therefore future-oriented (Ellegaard & Ritter, 2006). Furthermore, the initiation of the first contact solely occurs if both sides have the perception of attractiveness in regards to the relationship (Wilkinson, Young, & Freytag, 2005, p. 669).

The factors entailed in terms of attractiveness are well established in the literature. The attractiveness of a customer becomes apparent through its size and volume, as well as the modes of collaboration present inside the customer's operations (Christiansen & Maltz, p. 177). In addition to size and volume, the growth, and the influence of the customer in the market elaborate on the factors and drivers determining customer's attractiveness (Fiocca, 1982, p. 57). However, to clarify how the attractiveness can be increased, the determinants contributing to improved attractiveness are, for instance, promote fairness, and communication, share risk with the supplier, or enhance efficiency of operations (Ramsay & Wagner, 2009).

2.3 Successful initiation of the buyer-supplier relationship

2.3.1 The influence of ex-ante attractiveness on success, performance, and rewarding personal relationship

Engaging in a novel relationship between a supplier and a buyer requires the assessment of factors leading to a successful initiation of the relationship. In the light of this report, attractiveness is one of the factors clarifying the treatment of the buyer-supplier relationship with a successful commence.

The alliance between buyer and supplier and its success can be related to determinants, such as trust, coordination, information quality and sharing, joint problem solving, and the avoidance of strict conflict resolution tactics (Monczka, Petersen, Handfield, & Ragatz, 1998, p. 553). These terms can be associated with ex-ante attractiveness.

Another element of the buyer-supplier relationship taken into account from an ex-ante perspective encompasses the buyer-supplier relationship on a personal level, while clarifying the antecedents, which result in a successful initiation of contact. Firstly, the attraction is more probable to occur, if individuals experience repeated exposure, in functional proximity, while enjoying social compatibility (Harris, O'Malley, & Patterson, 2003, pp. 17-18). This is complemented by tight social and professional contacts between both sides, buyer and supplier side, what energizes the relationship (Ellegaard, Johansen, & Drejer, p. 346).

In essence, it is about embodying the idea of being a partner, who resembles competency. The coined term of being a "smart partner" entails the components of transparency, openness to novel ideas, and willingness bringing effort into a joint improvement (Cordon & Vollmann, 2008).

2.3.2 Relation between ex-ante attractiveness and preferred customer status

Due to change in the supplier environment, the alterations made on the procurement side become more and more apparent. The increased supplier power resulted in emphasizing reverse marketing tactics. In this regard the attractiveness of the customer increased in importance due to the shift of the burden from the supplier to the buyer (Schiele, Calvi, & Gibbert, 2012, p. 1178). This gives rise to a discussion about preferential treatment, and how this is related to ex-ante attractiveness (Hüttinger, Schiele, & Veldman, 2012, p. 1194).

First evidence of relating ex-ante attractiveness to the preferred customer status suggest that the factors of strategic fit, and predictable decision process, foster the preferred customer treatment (Bew, 2007). Furthermore, other findings indicate that geographical proximity, and being part of the same cluster strengthen the idea of becoming a preferred customer (Steinle & Schiele, 2008, p. 3). In addition, this is also important concerning the preferential allocation of resources from the supplier. This too is mediated by attractiveness (Pulles, Schiele, Veldman, & Hüttinger, 2016, p. 129). Another aspect

in relation to preferred customer treatment is supplier development. This again results in acquiring the preferred customer status, when relied upon the social capital theory (Blonska, 2010). In terms of the search for innovation and new technology in the surrounding environment of the company, the supplier may overtake the role of being the source of innovation. Interestingly, establishing close ties with a supplier in an innovation process may not involve higher prices (Schiele, Veldman, & Hüttinger, 2011, p. 1). In order to deal with rising dependence on the supplier, becoming attractive to the supplier is key (Schiele, Veldman, & Hüttinger, 2011, p. 7).

2.4 Relation between the influence of corporate reputation and ex-ante attractiveness on buyer-supplier relationships

Touching upon a field of interest for this research as well as to stress one of the factors of ex-ante attractiveness, is the aspect of corporate reputation. It represents a part of the sources for supplier value (Ramsay & Wagner, 2009, p. 129). The point of concern is how it dictates supplier decisions whom to give a preferential treatment in access to innovation, or the allocation of resources.

In order to provide definitions for corporate reputation, several distinct perspectives can be retrieved from the established literature. In this scenario, corporate reputation can be defined by a stakeholder's evaluation of their knowledge of a firm (Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006, p. 30). Hence, when assessing the knowledge about a firm, it may result in enhanced corporate reputation. This can be complemented by another measurement entailing the opinions of an organization developed over time (Bennett & Kottasz, 2000, p. 224). Over the course of occurrences, one can develop an opinion of a firm, which influences the perception of it. Indeed, corporate reputation can also be seen as an assessment made based on perceptions from, or the reflection of a firm's name (Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, pp. 30-31).

Particularly for the B2B environment, certain measurements are being outlined, for further understanding. Within the B2B market the measurements laid out comprise, for example, contractual trust, competence trust, and goodwill trust (Berens & van Riel, 2004, p. 168). Additionally, important, are credibility, and benevolence (Berens & van Riel, 2004, p. 165). Another set of corporate reputation measurements include top management, relationship with external groups, the supervisor, work fulfillment, future, physical working conditions, and friendliness (Berens & van Riel, 2004, p. 163).

These measurements give a hint on how corporate reputation is treated in B2B environment, and hence within the scope of the relationship between buyer and supplier. It can be seen that the aforementioned measurements do have its use when assessing the corporate reputation from a supplier point of view, and may aid them in deciding upon the approach of the relationship with the buyer. The linkage between corporate reputation and ex-ante attractiveness may

be apparent, however it needs backing by research. As already mentioned there is overlap between both, from the ex-ante attractiveness perspective (Ramsay & Wagner, 2009), as well as from the corporate reputation perspective (Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006, p. 30). To further strengthen the linkage both mention as determinants for each perspective the aspect of size or market leadership, and financial performance (Berens & van Riel, 2004, p. 165) (Christiansen & Maltz, 2002, p. 178) (Fiocca, 1982, p. 57).

The implications for the buyer-supplier relationship through the lens of corporate reputation are clear in terms of what are the determinants for a sound corporate reputation. However there are limitations on how to increase corporate reputation, hence what steps to take, within the realm of ex-ante attractiveness. Thus, finding out the actions leading to an increase in the perception of corporate reputation from the perspective of a supplier, and preferably achieve the status of preferential treatment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative and quantitative type of research

This research embodies both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to gather the data needed to back this research. The qualitative part of this research entails the execution of interviews with experts in the fields of sales and procurement. Both perspectives have been taken into consideration in order to gain the relevant amount of data. Additionally, further expansion of the source of the data has been made by not implementing constraints regarding industry of any kind, however still making sure the company operates in a B2B context.

Simultaneously, surveys have been distributed representing the quantitative part of this research. The participants resemble the same participants in the interviews. This has the intention to gain an overview of the companies being represented in this research.

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Data collection of the qualitative interviews

The selection of participants suitable for our research has been done the following way. The main constraints set for identifying participants with the desired expertise were knowledge of the respective fields of sales and procurement, and English language proficiency. Within our bachelor circle 42 interviews have been conducted with experts fulfilling the above mentioned requirements.

The structure of the interviews is characterized by a semi-structured composition consisting of seven questions including sub questions to certain topics (Appendix A, B). Each of the seven main questions represents a topic of interest. In this research however the main focus shall be on the main question and its sub questions embodying the topic of ex-ante attractiveness. To clarify the way of conducting the interviews it has to be mentioned that in each interview every topic was covered in order to gain a

representable sample to analyze. The sample size of this research is 42 interviews covering a diversified array of industries, such as the organic chemical industry or manufacturing. An additional remark regarding the interview structure is the duration of the interviews, which however varied across the different participants.

In order to process the information after the interview has been conducted, a recording device has been used to capture the content being discussed during the interview. The interview itself has either been held in a face to face conversation or via phone. Both approaches represent comparably accurate sources of collecting qualitative data, such as interviews (Rahman, 2015, p. 10). The recorded content was afterwards transferred from audio to text for purpose of analyzing the data in written form. For this task a transcription software was used with the ability to convert an audio file into a text file.

The text files however will not be disclosed in this research due to ethical considerations. These include the premise of avoiding undesired exposure of the participants in order to mitigate potential threats for the participants (Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 44). Furthermore, the data utilized to derive with the results will remain anonymized.

3.2.2 Data collection of the surveys

To elaborate on the qualitative findings gained through the interviews, additionally data has been collected via surveys. The layout of the survey consists of four domains, which includes the answering options on a Likert scale, and a characterization of the company the interviewee represents. Again the surveys will remain anonymized as well as not disclosed within this research due to the same intentions as mentioned earlier. The layout however for both the sales and procurement profession can be found under Appendix C and D.

3.3 Data preparation and analysis for the surveys and interviews

In order to arrive at an output useful for the analysis, the data has been standardized and inserted into an Excel with which we executed a computation of the weighted average of the scores entered in the surveys on the Likert scale. The weighted average shall permit to perform a distinction between successful and less successful companies and their characteristics.

The main source of information for this research are the data received out of the interviews, which undergo a content analysis. This means a manual coding and categorizing exercise complemented by the existing findings of the literature, and the search for relevant findings for the research questions.

3.4 Assisting tools utilized for this research

In pursuit of accelerating the content analysis through manual coding, the idea is to utilize the functions of machine learning and artificial intelligence to aid the coding process and ideally fully automate it. One of the programs to be tested is IBM Watson. In basic terms it is a system with

capabilities of giving answers to questions by using, for instance, natural language processing (Murtaza, Lak, Bener, & Pischdotchian, 2016). It represents a useful tool for a context characterized by large amounts of data which needs to be processed. The tool being used from the Watson toolbox is the natural language processing tool. This essentially performs an analysis of the most impacting terms inside a text and develops a ranking.

Another program to be tested is called Weka. As Watson it builds upon a machine learning and artificial intelligence system (Frank, et al.). Here the approach however is different. Firstly the systems is being trained with a sample of the interview data with the solution. Subsequently, with the gained knowledge from the training the systems is able to predict the solutions for another undetermined sample.

3.5 The rationale for choosing these particular methods

Contributing to the notion of using both the qualitative and the quantitative method is able create a strong research design (Sandelowski, 200, p. 246). In addition conducting interviews is a prominent source for qualitative data when understanding its drawbacks and potentials (Musselwhite, Cuff, McGregor, & King, 2007, p. 1064). One of the drawbacks certainly may be the high time consumption when exercising manual coding of 42 interviews as in this research. Thus, systems such as IBM Watson or Weka represent a promising option to try out a much quicker way of coding interviews. Furthermore, the output generated by those systems has the potential of reducing human derived error and perhaps has the ability to present surprising findings not being considered while manually coding the interviews. However, limitations of this approach have to be taken into account as well, such as the time and expertise required for setting up a sophisticated algorithm generating feasible output.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Findings collected from the interviews

4.1.1 Customers found through exhibitions, trade fairs, and networking

Within the 42 interviews having been conducted a prominent aspect being discussed was where suppliers and buyers found each other before the relationship initiation. This topic has occurred in 19 of the 42 interviews. There are different incidents where this occurred however one being the most popular.

The most frequently mentioned means to meet a new or already known contact is on trade fairs, exhibitions, or shows. The appearances of the use of, for instance, trade fairs was 16 times within the overall 19 related to the main theme of the preferred channel to nurture relationships. The frequency is no coincidence, since it corresponds to previous findings discovering a similar phenomenon. In (Bathelt & Spigel, 2012, p. 35) trade fairs are associated as “knowledge pipelines” which foster development or distributing ideas about new trends.

One perception of an interviewee resembled a similar idea of this exchange between different companies as an essential element of such events in contrast to the plausible priority of improving, for instance, sales:

“So yes you see a lot of customers but will you get a lot of new business? No you sort of try to reestablish or strengthen the relationship you have because you can see everybody again.”

The characteristics of these kind of events, such as shows, fairs, or exhibitions vary across the respondents. The type of trade fairs mention range from the local level to an international level.

The international character of a fair certainly expands the reach of suppliers and customers for new business, and cultivating connections all over the world (Palumbo & Herbig, 2008, p. 93).

The second most prominent means to be found by suppliers is internet search. This approach has been mentioned 9 times. One approach of doing so is for suppliers obtaining information about customers via corporate websites of the respective customer. Furthermore, other approaches may include conducting research on certain forums or other professional platforms fostering the exchange of information. This may as well support the network the suppliers have in order to find suitable customers for their product. Another way potentially connected to the network of a supplier is the mouth to mouth approach mentioned by another interviewee:

“So the mouth to mouth let us say advertisement is very strong. So if you hear very good stories about this customer you are also more willing to supply them.”

This functions as an aid to develop an overall picture of a customer.

Lastly, another medium being used to market oneself and being recognized by potential suppliers are magazines and/or publications. This however has only been rarely used with 3 appearances within the sample.

4.1.2 Corporate Reputation and Customer Attractiveness

Corporate reputation related instances have appeared in 23 cases out of the overall 42 interviews having been conducted. The responses being made concerning corporate reputation of a customer entail hard and soft factors with which a distinction can be made. The hard factors being those easily quantifiable, while the soft factors embody those which are less easy to measure or quantify. The soft factors shall encompass the notion of corporate reputation being present on the supplier side over the customer. In contrast the hard factors considered in this research include the size of the company, its financial capability and situation, the mentioning of international operations, and growth potential for the supplier.

Firstly, the most frequently mentioned aspect mentioned representing a component of the hard factors is size. It occurred 9 times within the 23 instances. Classically, which is referred to characteristics such as being a big player in the respective industry: *“Usually we are attractive*

because in the fast moving consumer goods industry we are a big player.”

Furthermore, this explanation further evolves into a decreasing need to sell the business, meaning with the size given, the resources needed to initiate a business relationship with a supplier become less:

“You do not have to do a lot in this context because we are a big company offering the potential of making ongoing business.”

The aspect of “ongoing business” is a crucial point to have a certain stability inherent in the relationship. Additionally, supporting the stability of a relationship is a “long lasting success of supply.”

Supporting the context of size is the volume a customer needs to represent for the supplier to operate its business. With big volumes a customer logically becomes attractive due to the revenue gains from such a transaction. The aspect of volume has been mentioned 6 times within the 23 interviews. In certain cases the fact of purchasing big volumes decreases the need for selling the business to supplier, as inherent in the variable of size of the customer. This notion is as well represented in the prioritization of the supplier, which may have volume representing a high priority due to it driving revenue.

Further elaborating on size the aspects to consider are of financial nature: The financial situation and the financial capabilities of a customer likewise play a role in the attractiveness of a customer. The appearance of related topics is 4 times. Firstly, the amount the company can spend on a purchase is an important factor in order to be seen as an attractive customer. The financial situation on the other hand is focused on the financial state of the customer. It is concerned with the customer’s financial wellbeing. In essence, if the business will continue to exist in the future. If not, concerns may arise from the supplier side evaluating if an investment in the relationship will be beneficial long term:

“Are you working together with a winner. Or do you see [...]this company during the next couple of years will get into a tight situation anyway.”

In order to establish a long lasting relationship the financial situation is crucial and has to be considered beforehand due to its vital nature of business.

Another important notion is the impact the customer has within its territory, in which it operates. Certainly, the bigger the territory in reach of the customer the more lucrative for the supplier to commence a relationship with a customer with that characteristic. This enables the supplier through the range of the network to grow. When looking through the lens of a long term commitment the aspect of the customer maintaining its position is also beneficial for the supplier and an important component in the decision of how attractive the customer is:

“At the end of the day [...] you are trying to work together with the companies who have a certain strength in the market and not just for tomorrow but for the next years.”

The second most frequent instance to be observed is concerning the growth potential a customer can offer

a supplier to be recognized as attractive. It appeared like size nine times in this context. In the event of not having the possibility of proposing such a potential, the supplier may be less inclined to invest in the relationship. However, in the case of representing a growth potential as a customer, attractiveness of initiating a relationship rises, since it corresponds with future financial gains. Furthermore, long term and sustainable growth is in favor of both parties, which over a certain period of time has the capability to strengthen the overall state of the relationship.

In more detail, the notion of supporting a supplier in the process of accessing a new market yields attractiveness. The buying firm already maintaining a foothold in a market promising for a supplier gives the customer the capability to aid the supplier in the process of accessing the market and perhaps jointly developing it. In return the buying firm may receive a preferred customer status with the supplier. Other scenarios include the implementation of a new product of the supplier on the market with the assistance of the customer or even the introduction of the product to other customers within the network of the originally supporting customer.

Lastly, the attractiveness of a customer can also be found in the context of globalization. Suppliers favor the idea of serving a multinational company often combining all the previously mentioned variables. Supplying a globally operating firm gives the supplier access to the internal network of the company nurturing growth within the organization itself. Often times a multinational company can be considered as well known. This gives the supplier the opportunity to utilize the knowledge about the customer to sophisticate its own marketing strategy.

Aside from the hard factors playing a crucial role within the realm of customer attractiveness, soft factors do represent distinct elements to consider as well. In this research in total 18 occurrences of soft factors concerning the corporate reputation of a customer have been recognized. The most frequent appearances were in direct relation to the term of corporate reputation, which has been determined to be emerging 11 times out of the dataset. Other sub occurrences entail ethics, loyalty, and reliability each appearing 2 times.

The knowledge of the suppliers over the customers is a component which enriches the picture of corporate reputation the supplier has of the customer (Lewellyn, 2002, p. 30). With the notion of suppliers knowing about the financial capabilities of the customer, a considerable amount can be expected to be spent on the products needed for their operations. Hence, a driver of corporate reputation. In addition, when being aware of the size of the customer, it can be associated with the potential for ongoing business and market strength and impact. Again, the knowledge of a factor contributes to being able to assess the corporate reputation of a customer and with that its attractiveness. In this case size is determining further elaboration on the corporate reputation. Another example mediating the corporate reputation present with suppliers is sustainability of work being undertaken within the customer’s operations. When considering sustainable conduct it

embodies, for instance, environmental considerations, or complying with the laws and regulations in general. With sound policies in place encouraging environmental safety, respectively adhering to the law provides a good foundation of corporate reputation, when suppliers have the knowledge of such an oversight by the customer.

Connected to the notion of embracing awareness of the customer's overall picture is the reflection of a firm's name (Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006, p. 31):

"It is oftentimes important for suppliers to say they are supplying to [...] because we are a global multinational CPG company."

Due to confidentiality the name is not disclosed however it clarifies the weight of a name a customer may bear. The name may carry leverage, and a certain recognition in the market representing an individual asset of the buying firm. Hence, a value is connected to the name, which can also become beneficial for suppliers in terms of marketing their company. This value has potential to dictate to a certain degree the corporate reputation of a customer.

In addition to reflecting on the name of a potential customer, is the evolution of opinions of an organization noticed over a period of time (Bennett & Kottasz, p. 224). This may include a track record of supplier treatment as mentioned from one respondent. This entails the conception rendered from the past actions of the company reflecting the opinions ones have of the company. Thus, mediating the corporate reputation of the customer. In other instances respondents utilized terms, such as "well known", or "well established" consequently representing a development of opinions over time due to the nature of investing time in order to be recognized as an established player in the market. Furthermore, another term elaborating on the opinions being held of customers is prestige:

"[...]is this a big company a reliable company with a certain prestige in the market so that we can benefit from this."

The conception may have the possibility to be connected to the company's name and its value, however focusing on the origin of a certain prestige is time consuming and involves the creation of the opinion of the supplier in this case. When reaching a level of prestige as being shown by the respondent this may, corresponding with the notion of the value of a name, render benefits for the supplier itself. Thus, influencing the corporate reputation of the customer.

A slightly distinctive concept from developing opinions are assessments which derive from perceptions constructed of an organization (Barnett, Jermier, & Lafferty, 2006, p. 30). In essence, the context to be considered important is the reputation in the marketplace, or corporate reputation respectively, of a customer. This perception a supplier has over the customer is nurtured by, however not limited to, the size of the company including potential market leadership, positive branding, innovativeness, and the global activity. Furthermore, it is essential for a company to succeed:

"You need to have a good product and a good reputation [...]"

Through the lens of a supplier the corporate reputation of a customer has indeed risks to develop for the worse too. Within the network of a supplier information may be exchanged about a customer altering the perceptions of suppliers about potential customers in a negative manner.

Phasing out negative reshaping of perceptions about buying organizations, the reputation of a customer in the marketplace additionally being associated with credibility, benevolence, and trust (Berens & van Riel, 2004, p. 165). Detailed in the findings are, besides aspects of credibility, the ideal of acting responsibly, morally, and ethically justifiable. The customer shall embody, for instance, adhering to standards in environmental protection. In other cases mentioned in the data, it was pointed out, as a customer, to distance itself from criminal activity, with the influence of damaging the reputation. Hence, in turn, being a credible business partner potentially, resembles importance in the buyer-supplier relationship. Lastly, another factor is loyalty, which may be favored by suppliers, since this represents a form of stability, as well as credibility in a potential customer. It can be assumed that the experience of loyalty of a new customer must stem from other suppliers which have worked with the customer previously, and thus sharing the information, as in the case of informing the network of a less suitable customer for conducting business.

In conclusion, the findings can be summarized as seen in Figure 2.

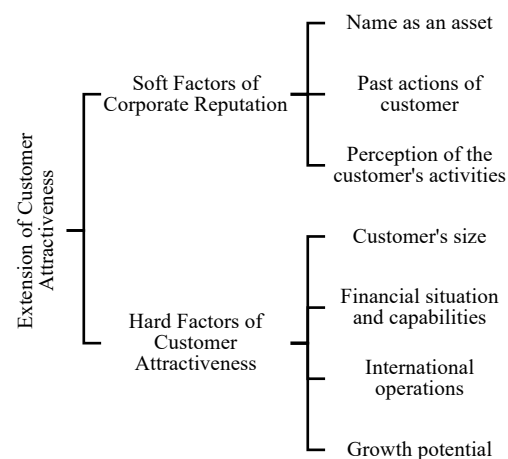


Figure 2: Integrating elements of corporate reputation under the umbrella of customer attractiveness

In essence, the illustration of Figure 2 postulates the relation between aspects of customer attractiveness and corporate reputation joined under the overall picture of customer attractiveness. The soft factors extend the established factors of attractiveness.

4.2 Characteristics of highly reputable companies and less highly reputable companies

The survey conducted with 41 participants and its results can be divided into two groups, while distinguished by the average score. In the case of this survey the average on the Likert scale was approximately 3,927 (Appendix E). Out of the 41 interviews 24 were above the average, while 17 fell below it. Hence, the 24 respondents consider their company embodying a high standing in terms of status, prestige, admiration by others and being highly regarded by others. On the other side the 17 respondents scoring below the average perceive a lower standing of their firm. Thus, the findings in more detail are as follows. The results are summarized in Figure 3.

Factors	Above Average Companies	Below Average Companies
Turnover	€6.65 billion	€749 million
Employees	15,345	440
Years of Employment	10 years	14 years
Public vs Private Ownership	12 and 11	4 and 13
Industries	Body care, personal hygiene, beverages	Automotive technology, IT

Figure 3: Summary of the values of the survey illustrating the discrepancy between above and below average companies

For the group scoring higher than 3,9 the average the turnover is about 6,65 billion Euros. Due to lack of data from some of the interviews regarding the turnover of the organization, the number of cases used to calculate the average was 17 instead of 24. Concerning the average employees employed by these organizations is 15345. Here no data was missing in order to calculate the average. For the average years of employment one survey did not contain the relevant data, nevertheless an average was computed for the duration of employment of the respondent at the current company. Within the above average scoring organizations the average is 10 years of employment. Furthermore, the firms of the respondents were either characterized by publicly listed or privately owned businesses. For this group there is no considerable difference to be observed, which form is more commonly represented. 12 of the organizations were publicly owned, while 11 are in private ownership. Again one survey could not be considered. Lastly, the industries mirrored by this class are widely spread, however the most often industries are body care, and personal hygiene and food, and beverage companies. 3 times mentioned are the organic chemical, and manufacturing industry.

In contrast to the highly reputable organizations in the surveys, a similar analysis can be made with those

organizations scoring lower than average. For them the average turnover has been visibly lower than the turnover of the other surveys, having an average turnover of approximately 748 million Euros. The difference between the averages is roughly 5,9 billion Euros. Identically large with the gap between the turnovers is the difference between the number of employees which in the below average group is 440. An apparent difference as well exists within the choice of organizational structure. For the group below average the number of privately owned businesses is more than triple than the number of publicly held companies. Public companies account for 4 instances, while 13 companies account for privately held companies. Furthermore, employees remain longer in the below average group with 14 years compared to the 10 years of employment in the within the highly reputable organizations. In addition, both groups vary in the choice of industries as well. In this case the most frequently represented industries are automotive technology and information and media technology, each occurring 4 times. This is followed by development (service), and organic chemical industry. The latter appears in both groups at the top. One of the industries mentioned twice is home technology.

In conclusion, the most noteworthy point to consider from this comparison is the aspect of size. When being in a job in a corporation representing a high turnover and a large employer, respondents perceive an organization with a high standing within its environment, and being highly regarded by others.

4.3 Reflecting on the results of IBM Watson and Weka

In the case of IBM Watson the output is a list of keywords ranked by their relevance score (Appendix F). The word count of the keyword is mentioned as well however can be neglected, since the relevance score serves as the main indicator. The relevance score represents the importance of a keyword within a sentence and its overall context, and ranks them accordingly. The IBM Watson output has been altered due to ensure anonymity of the participants. Derived from this output is the keyword ranked the highest is “limited number of suppliers” with a score of 0,7047. The following score lies visibly lower at 0,5929 with a word count of 2, namely “customer base”. The third and fourth keyword being “company of the size of [..]” and “key suppliers” with a relevance score of 0,5757 and 0,5682 respectively. The subsequent keywords and their relevance scores smooth out and further decrease in relevance.

Due to these keywords not being presented within a context it produces difficulty in drawing a meaningful conclusion out of the ranking of the keywords. A similar conclusion can be retrieved from the output generated by the Weka system (Appendix G). In the output the system delivers potential answers to a from the application unknown dataset, including a prediction error score. What can be retrieved from the output is rather of minimal value. With the training and the test set being rather small (n=21 each) in data terms, the outcome renders not applicable for answering the research questions. With classifying every instance with an “A” of the

four categories having been determined prior to the data classification (A, B, C, D). Compared to manually classifying the instances also utilized for the set, the overlap is modest. Hence, with the outcomes of both methods being questioned they will play a minor role with this research progressing.

5. CONCLUSION

In this research the determined aim was to clarify the linkage between the concept of corporate reputation and the ex-ante construct of attractiveness within the buyer-supplier relationship. With the aid of qualitative data gained from interviews and quantitative data retrieved from surveys, the interconnection of customer attractiveness and corporate reputation revealed its strong bond. The results indicate that in the overall context of customer attractiveness the corporate reputation of a customer plays a major role. Secondarily, what has been questioned as well are the actions of buying firms in order to sophisticate their corporate reputation towards suppliers. In the context of ex-ante attractiveness this appeared to be less feasible, at least in the short term. Due to the nature of it having to evolve over time, and often times connected to factors, such as size, or the development of a connection between an organization's name and reputation, which is a complex task to achieve.

Reflecting on the research of this paper the concept of customer attractiveness intertwined with corporate reputation has not been widely outspoken in the literature, although overlap being apparent in both fields. Hence, finding a theoretical bond between both conceptions was rather clear. However, identifying occurrences in business practice has been a motivation in order to strengthen the bond. And indeed when asking interviewees within the context of customer attractiveness a conceptualization of the term corporate reputation has emerged, whether it is connected to the company's name as an asset or the primitive connection being drawn between quantifiable terms, such as company size, financial situation or capability, or the plain volume a customer demands. Especially, the hard factors nurture the knowledge about a customer which in turn nurtures its reputation in the market. Thus, becoming more attractive and more approachable for the supplier. Complementary with the hard factors are the soft factors which emerged during the conversations, and correspond with the idea of corporate reputation in the literature. Corporate reputation is a construct built upon opinions developed by the supplier and its perception of the buying organization. When searching for a potential new customer often times the first reflex has been to name established and well-known companies representing a first choice for initiating a relationship with a customer. Hence, this represents the role of corporate reputation very well when being applied in the realm of customer attractiveness. The assessment of a customer thus far comprehending its characteristics of embodying various valuable assets attractive for a supplier, reveals a beneficial foundation for a buyer-supplier relationship.

On the other hand there is a lack of insight not being gained from this research about actions of the

customer to enhance their attractiveness, and their corporate reputation respectively. It is rather difficult to propose primitive solutions, such as focusing on growth in order to purchase more goods and driving a reputation in the market. This is certainly too comprehensive to cover with this research. Developing a corporate reputation is time consuming and it involves several factors to look out for.

In consideration of the findings of this paper further research is needed to determine the actions involved in reputation enhancement in order to profit from it as well as, for instance, well established, large corporations. This can aid the development of new strategies rooting in the antecedents of customer attractiveness. A possible route can be focusing on factors outside of the general perception of customers driving the notion of corporate reputation as outlined in this research. When deducting the concept of striving for size and financial capabilities other areas of focus can be accelerating innovations, or fostering personal relationships, which are less dependent on the size of an organization, while influencing customer attractiveness. Hence, discovering strategies fitting with this notion has the opportunity to elaborate further on the idea of customer attractiveness and corporate reputation.

In conclusion, the attempt to shine more light on the linkage between customer attractiveness and corporate reputation has evidence to have been successful. Derived from genuine qualitative interviews which present unique insights into the practice of business. The contribution of this paper elaborates on the theoretical overlap of corporate reputation and customer attractiveness, while here being considered in conjunction with one another. Identifying key elements of corporate reputation and the derivation of its influence on supplier decisions on whom to supply prior to the relationship initiation. Thus, being a strong factor to take into account when reflecting upon customer attractiveness.

5.1 Limitations

5.1.1 *Limitations of artificial intelligence utilized in the context of qualitative data analysis*

With the use of software building upon artificial intelligence in order to automate the process of coding the interviews has certainly its drawbacks when considering the experience with these tools in data analysis activities. Firstly, this kind of use of technology was a novel experience, hence little was known about its implications. Additionally, our focus on business studies does not entail a fundamental understanding of coding algorithms with the aim to automate the analysis of the interviews. Certainly, this kind of exercise exceeded our expertise in this fields, and would probably be considered as going beyond the original scope of the research. Furthermore, the factor of time plays a crucial role when considering the integration of such a use of software for academic purposes which additionally extends further the constraints of such an experiment within this scope of research.

Watson itself has its use in various different applications. It excels at tasks involving processing

vast amounts of data. However, the natural language processing tool which was used in our case to analyze the interview data, revealed its drawbacks in this type of study. The issues arose with the outcome IBM Watson had generated, which delivers a ranking of keywords and their relevance score. Considering our intentions these outcomes were not sufficient for an in-depth analysis of the data. Similarly, the output delivered by Weka unveils its limitations in terms of the usability of the results. Hence, the artificial intelligence in our setup may not yet comprehend what is being asked and specifically being looked for. Certainly, more time resources, data, and an individual knowledge about coding may resemble an opportunity to advance this method in the future.

5.1.2 Limitations of the research findings from qualitative and quantitative data

Due to the lack of data concerning this particular issue, the results cannot confirm advisable actions for buying organizations which enhance the corporate reputation as a factor in customer attractiveness. This research however contributed to reinforcing the interconnection between corporate reputation and customer attractiveness. Due to the nature of the gathering of the data not providing a framework of the companies' characteristics may benefit generalizing over a number of industries, however installing more constraints in the data collection may result in more explicit and more detailed findings regarding certain industries or company characteristics.

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8. APPENDICES

Appendix A

Questionnaire for Purchasers

Purchaser interview set "Improving buyer's standing with supplier"

Q1	Positive episodes	Are there specific events/ episodes that contributed positively to the relationship with your supplier(s)?		
Q2	Attractiveness	Let's systematically look at buyer-supplier relationships. The start: What factors had influence on the supplier building up a relationship with your company at first hand (attractiveness = before the start)?	How do you identify (new) suppliers / how they came to know about you?	
Q3	Satisfaction	What did you do in your firm to increase supplier satisfaction (i.e. during the ongoing relationship once it is established)? Internally and externally?	How do you identify what your suppliers expect most from the relationship with your firm?	Do you measure supplier satisfaction? How?
Q4	Preferred customer	Imagine your supplier having several customers to serve, who gets the delivery first? It is the preferred customer. What did you do in your firm to become a preferred customer and outperform other customers?	What do you do to stay preferred customer?	What are you doing differently to address far away suppliers, i.e. to be a preferred customer with those suppliers located in distant countries?
Q5	Regular activities	What specific periodic/ regular activities is your company engaged in to improve your standing with your suppliers?	E.g. Supplier day, supplier club, any upstream marketing applications, awards/ certificates, supplier development, yearly communication, innovation sharing	
Q6	Negative episodes	What should generally be avoided in order not to annoy the supplier? Have there been actions from your firm which have negatively impacted your relationship with (specific) suppliers?	In case in your firm different people have contact relationships with the same supplier, how does one negative relationship of someone from your company affect the overall relationships with the same supplier?	How did you fix negative impacts on the relationship?
Q7	Ease of implementation	To conclude: Which would be the five most important steps you recommend someone who want to start a programme to improve standing with suppliers?	What supplier-customer programmes/activities to improve the relationship do you perceive to be easy and which are difficult to prepare, implement and/or perform?	

Fill in short survey now!

Appendix B

Questionnaire for Sales Directors

Sales person interview set "Improving buyer's standing with supplier"

Q1	Positive episodes	Are there specific events/ episodes that contributed positively to the relationship with your customer(s)?		
Q2	Attractiveness	Let's systematically look at buyer-supplier relationships. The start: What factors had influence on you building up a relationship with a particular customer in the first place (attractiveness = before the start)?	How do you identify (new) customer(s) / How do you come to know about them?	Do you classify customers? If so, how?
Q3	Satisfaction	What did your customer do in his firm to increase your satisfaction (i.e. during the ongoing relationship once it is established)? What did your customers do internally (e.g. in their processes) or externally (involving you)?	How do your customers identify what you as a supplier expect most from the relationship with them?	Does any of them measure supplier satisfaction (i.e. how satisfied you are with the relationship to your customer(s))? How do they do it?
Q4	Preferred customer	Imagine you're having several customers to serve with the same good/capacity, who gets the delivery first? It is the preferred customer. What did your customer(s) do in order to become your "preferred customer" and outperform other customers?	What do they do to stay a preferred customers?	What are customers that are far away doing differently than the ones closeby?
Q5	Regular activities	What specific periodic/ regular activities do your customers organize to improve their standing with you?	E.g. Supplier day, supplier club, any upstream marketing applications, awards/ certificates, supplier development, yearly communication, innovation sharing	
Q6	Negative episodes	What should buying firms generally avoid in order not to annoy their supplier? Have there been actions from your customers which have negatively impacted your relationship with them?	In case in your firm different people have contact relationships with the same customer, how does one negative relationship of someone from their company affect the overall relationships with you as the supplier?	How did they fix negative impacts on the relationship?
Q7	Ease of implementation	To conclude: Which would be the five most important steps you recommend customers who want to start a programme to improve their standing with you as a supplier?	What supplier-customer activities/programs that your customers organize are easy to cooperate on and which are difficult to cooperate on? Think in the sense of time, resources and/or preparation it requires.	

Fill in short survey now!

Appendix C

Survey Purchasing

In order to systematically understand the context of your situation, please be so kind to, eventually, answer the following questions:

Supplier Satisfaction					
Most of our suppliers...	1	2	3	4	5 (ver)
...are very satisfied with the overall relationship to us					
...are very pleased to have us as their business partner					
...if they had to do it all over again, would still choose to serve us as customer					
...do not regret the decision to do business with us					

Preferred Customer Status					
Compared to other customers in our suppliers's customer base, on average...	1	2	3	4	5 (ver)
...we are their preferred customer					
...they care more for us					
...we receive preferential treatment					
...our suppliers go out on a limb for us					
...our suppliers' employees prefer collaborating with us to collaborating with other customers					

Status					
In the view of our suppliers, our firm...	1	2	3	4	5 (ver)
...has a high status					
...is admired by others					
...has a high prestige					
...is highly regarded by others					

Success of supplier management					
	1	2	3	4	5 (ver)
Our supplier management is better than that of our competitors.					
Overall, we are satisfied with our supplier management					
In recent years, we were able to minimize supplier dissatisfaction					
In recent years, we improved our supplier management more than our competitors did					

General information	
Annual Turnover (in €). (When you belong to a firm-group, please provide the details of your firm branch!)	
Number of employees	
Ownership (private, public)	
What is your position in the company?	
Since how many years you are in purchasing with your company?	

Please chose your firm's ecl@ss classification from the following list:
(For more information to determine your ecl@ss please visit <http://www.eclasscontent.com>)

13 Development (Service)	30 Auxiliary supply, additive, cleaning agent
14 Logistics (Service)	31 Polymer
15 Maintenance (Service)	32 Laboratory material, Laboratory technology
16 Food, beverage, tobacco	33 Installation (complete)
17 Machine, device (for special application)	34 Medical Device
18 Equipment f. mining, metallurgical plant, rolling mill & foundry	35 Semifinished product, material
19 Information, communication and media technology	36 Machine, apparatus
20 Packing material	37 Industrial piping
21 Manufacturing facility, workshop equipment	38 Inorganic Chemical
22 Construction technology	39 Organic Chemical
23 Machine element, fixing mounting	40 Occupational safety, accident prevention
24 Office product, facility and technic, papeterie	41 Marketing
25 General Service	42 In-vitro diagnostic
26 Energy, extraction product, secondary raw material and residue	43 Optics
27 Electric engineering, automation, process control engineering	44 Motorvehicle
28 Automotive technology	45 Human and veterinary drug, pesticide as well as active ingredient
29 Home economics, Home technology	46 Clothing and textile
	47 Body care and personal hygiene
	48 Sport, playing, leisure
	49 Public safety and military technology
	90 Interim class (mix)

Many thanks for collaborating!

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Appendix D

Survey Sales

In order to systematically understand the context of your situation, please be so kind to, eventually, answer the following questions:

Satisfaction with customers					
With most of our customers...	1	2	3	4	5 (ver)
...we are very satisfied with the overall relationship to us					
...we are very pleased to have them as our business partners					
...if we had to do it all over again, would still choose to serve them as supplier					
...we do not regret the decision to do business with them					

Preferred Customer Status					
Compared to other customers in our suppliers's customer base, some...	1	2	3	4	5 (ver)
... are our preferred customer					
... we care more for them					
... receive preferential treatment from us					
... we go out on a limb for them					
... our employees prefer collaborating with them to collaborating with other customers					

Status					
In the view of our customers, our firm...	1	2	3	4	5 (ver)
...has a high status					
...is admired by others					
...has a high prestige					
...is highly regarded by others					

Success of customer relationship management					
	1	2	3	4	5 (ver)
Our customer management is better than that of our competitors.					
Overall, we are satisfied with our customer management					
In recent years, we were able to minimize customer dissatisfaction					
In recent years, we improved our customer management more than our competitors did					

General information	
Annual Turnover (in €). (When you belong to a firm-group, please provide the details of your firm branch)	
Number of employees	
Ownership (private, public)	
What is your position in the company?	
Since how many years you are in sales with your company?	

Please chose your firm's economic classification from the following list:
(For more information to determine your ecl@ss please visit <http://www.eclasscontent.com>)

13 Development (Service)	30 Auxiliary supply, additive, cleaning agent
14 Logistics (Service)	31 Polymer
15 Maintenance (Service)	32 Laboratory material, Laboratory technology
16 Food, beverage, tobacco	33 Installation (complete)
17 Machine, device (for special application)	34 Medical Device
18 Equipment f.mining, metallurgical plant, rolling mill a. foundry	35 Semifinished product, material
19 Information, communication and media technology	36 Machine, apparatus
20 Packing material	37 Industrial piping
21 Manufacturing facility, workshop equipment	38 Inorganic Chemical
22 Construction technology	39 Organic Chemical
23 Machine element, fixing mounting	40 Occupational safety, accident prevention
24 Office product, facility and technic, papeterie	41 Marketing
25 General Service	42 In-vitro diagnostic
26 Energy, extraction product, secondary raw material and residue	43 Optics
27 Electric engineering, automation, process control engineering	44 Motorvehlice
28 Automotive technology	45 Human and veterinary drug, pesticide as well as active ingredient
29 Home economics, Home technology	46 Clothing and textile
	47 Body care and personal hygiene
	48 Sport, playing, leisure
	49 Public safety and military technology
	90 Interim class (mix)

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Appendix E

Average and Median Calculation of Survey Outcomes

Firm	Status_1	Status_2	Status_3	Status_4	Status_Average	Turnover
#1	4	4	5	4	4.25	
#2	4	4	5	4	4.25	
#3	4	4	5	4	4.25	
#4	4	4	5	4	4.25	
#5	4	3	4	4	3.75	
#6	3	3	3	3	3	
#7	3	3	4	4	3.5	
#8	4	4	5	5	4.5	
#9	4	4	5	4	4.25	
#10	3	3	2	3	2.75	
#11	3	3	3	3	3	
#12	4	4	4	4	4	
#13	4	4	4	4	4	
#14	4	4	4	4	4	
#15	5	1	2	4	3	
#16	5	5	5	5	5	
#17	5	5	5	5	5	
#18	4	3	4	4	3.75	
#19	5	5	5	5	5	
#20	5	5	5	5	5	
#21	4	3	3	3	3.25	
#22	4	4	4	4	4	
#23	3	3	3	3	3	
#24	5	5	5	5	5	
#25	5	3	4	4	4	
#26	5	4	4	4	4.25	
#27	4	3	4	4	3.75	
#28	2	2	3	2	2.25	
#29	2	3	3	2	2.5	
#30	3	3	3	3	3	
#31	4	4	4	3	3.75	
#32	4	4	4	4	4	
#33	3	3	4	4	3.5	
#34	5	4	3	4	4	
#35	5	5	5	5	5	
#36	4	4	4	3	3.75	
#37	5	4	5	4	4.5	
#38	5	5	5	3	4.5	
#39	4	3	3	4	3.5	empty
#40	5	4	4	5	4.5	
#41	5	5	4	4	4.5	
				Status_AVERA	3.9268293	
				Status_Media	4	

Appendix F

Output IBM Watson

```
Keywords
text    relevance    count
limited number of suppliers    0.7047  1
customer base    0.5929  2
company of the size of [...]    0.5757  1
key suppliers    0.5682  1
detailed look    0.5574  1
new suppliers    0.5524  6
big amounts of money    0.5522  1
new area    0.5486  2
trade fairs    0.5478  5
much time    0.5421  1
line of business    0.5413  1
different people    0.5402  1
raw materials    0.5336  2
good network    0.5330  1
business relationship    0.5316  2
wonderful product    0.5315  1
little bit trial    0.5312  1
supplier tries    0.5297  1
first thing    0.5283  3
market pricing    0.5278  1
Thats thats    0.5270  1
[...]
current suppliers    0.5230  4
suppliers    0.5223  38
large part of the market    0.5221  1
production facilities    0.5218  1
new account manager    0.5208  1
important things    0.5203  1
specific customer    0.5199  1
possible suppliers    0.5197  1
technical departments business development    0.5193  1
marketplace [...]    0.5190  1
different reasons    0.5189  1
[...]
simple question    0.5182  1
much sense    0.5181  1
sell crates    0.5166  1
lot of money    0.5163  3
higher price    0.5158  1
main focus    0.5149  1
potential buyer    0.5144  1
local relationships    0.5144  1
reliable customer    0.5143  1
new supplier    0.5142  2
next year    0.5141  3
contact purchase    0.5135  1
competitors suppliers    0.5134  1
Market research    0.5129  1
potential future business    0.5126  1
account manager cant    0.5126  1
```

Appendix G

Output Weka

=== Predictions on user test set ===

inst#	actual	predicted	error	prediction
1	1:?	1:A		1
2	1:?	1:A		0.663
3	1:?	1:A		1
4	1:?	1:A		1
5	1:?	1:A		1
6	1:?	1:A		1
7	1:?	1:A		1
8	1:?	1:A		1
9	1:?	1:A		1
10	1:?	1:A		1
11	1:?	1:A		1
12	1:?	1:A		1
13	1:?	1:A		1
14	1:?	1:A		1
15	1:?	1:A		1
16	1:?	1:A		1
17	1:?	1:A		1
18	1:?	1:A		1
19	1:?	1:A		0.999
20	1:?	1:A		1
21	1:?	1:A		1