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Mobilising supplier resources by being an attractive customer

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Editorial

Mobilising supplier resources by being an attractive customer: Relevance, status and future research directions

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ABSTRACT

For buying companies, supplier resource mobilisation is an essential process in gaining and sustaining preferential access to supplier resources. This editorial provides insights into the processes of supplier resource mobilisation and introduces three empirical studies on supplier resource mobilisation. We first introduce the supplier resource mobilisation cycle. This cycle may serve as a roadmap for purchasing and supply management (PSM) practitioners seeking to improve access to supplier resources. In addition, this article informs PSM scholars about the status of the supplier resource mobilisation literature and proposes avenues for future research. The cycle includes six stages: (1) becoming an attractive customer, (2) segmenting suppliers, (3) generating supplier satisfaction, (4) becoming a preferred customer, (5) engaging in supplier-oriented actions, and (6) integrating supplier resources. Finally, we introduce the articles in this issue that each examine a different stage of the supplier resource mobilisation process.

1. Introduction: supplier resource mobilisation as a core task of purchasing

The strategic role of purchasing and supply management (PSM) has gained substantial interest in the literature (Tchokogué et al., 2017; van Weele and van Raaij, 2014). As the importance of suppliers for company-level competitiveness has grown in recognition, upstream supplier relationships have become an important vehicle for gaining downstream advantages (Dyer et al., 2018; Weigelt, 2013; Yan et al., 2017). The organisational resources suppliers allocate to the development, production, and distribution of goods/services have been shown to be an important determinant for how much a buyer gains from the relationship (Crook and Esper, 2014; Schiele et al., 2012). However, because suppliers have limits to the resources they can dedicate to specific buyers, the prioritisation of one buyer comes at the expense of another (Castellucci and Ertug, 2010; Gulati and Sytch, 2008; Hunt and Davis, 2008; Mitsuhashi and Greve, 2009). For the buying company, it is therefore essential to know how to mobilise supplier resources and to be prioritised by suppliers.

There are different types of supplier resources, all of which share one common characteristic: they are scarce. Hence, they present an allocation problem. For instance, a supplier has to decide on the allocation of the following:

- sales personnel's attention (including efforts to develop tailor-made solutions for a particular customer and to set prices to optimise sustainable revenues),
- development capacity (research and development staff and laboratory or testing time),
- production capacity (particularly in cases of bottleneck and full order books),
- logistic scheduling prioritisation

- service and problem solution capacity (including utilisation problems that might appear in the after-sales process)

Because supplier resources are scarce, buying companies — knowingly or unknowingly — compete over supplier resources (Pulles et al., 2016a). This is particularly true in non-atomistic business markets, where the decision of a supplier to serve one customer has an influence on the supplier's capacity to serve another customer. The challenge for the buying company is to win this competition in a reliable and cost-efficient manner. The buyer that becomes a preferred customer (Steinle and Schiele, 2008) gets privileged access to a supplier's resources and gains a competitive advantage vis à vis its supply-base competitors (i.e., the other customers of the supplier). Supplier resource mobilisation therefore stands at the core of the purchaser's objectives.

Supplier resource mobilisation refers to the buying company's efforts to influence supplier resource allocation. Despite recent research into this phenomenon (e.g., Andersen and Gadde, 2018; Ellegaard and Koch, 2012), supplier resource mobilisation processes are not well understood. In particular, while the importance and benefits of preferential resource allocation have been described, the central question on how to obtain preferential access to a supplier's resources remains largely open. Therefore, the aim of this special topic forum is to extend our knowledge on supplier resource mobilisation and to encourage future research on this topic.

Three articles are presented in this special topic forum (Glavee-Geo, 2019; Pihlajamaa et al., 2019; Wadell et al., 2019). Each of them contributes to the central question of how to mobilise supplier resources. Glavee-Geo (2019) elaborates on supplier development as a particular tool achieving supplier resource mobilisation, Wadell et al. (2019) introduce expectation management as a way to ensure a supplier's continuing commitment, and Pihlajamaa et al. (2019) discuss tools to stimulate a supplier's innovation resource allocation. Before

presenting these articles, we first discuss the relevance of supplier resource mobilisation for PSM research.

2. Relevance and benefits of successful supplier resource mobilisation

From a supplier's perspective, customer segmentation helps to improve marketing performance by allocating resources to the most valuable customers—and consequently treating some individual customers or segments as preferred and others as standard (Wetzel et al., 2014). In the marketing literature, several models have been developed that support such customer differentiation. For instance, Windler et al. (2016) present a comprehensive customer attractiveness matrix, distinguishing between the current quality of the relationship and the future potential of the customer. Customer differentiation is an important part of a supplier's key account management (Brehmer and Rehme, 2009; McDonald et al., 1997). Cordón and Vollmann (2008, p. 14) go so far as to recommend that selling companies should pick just 10 “smart customers” and closely interact with them, with a clear consequence: “The customer that is most attractive will receive a greater proportion of its key suppliers' brainpower than its competitors will.” For buying companies, the challenge is to become one of these customers.

The literature reports a variety of benefits for preferred customers. In general, research has found that preferred customers benefit from achieving competitive advantages (Pulles et al., 2016b) by obtaining higher supplier commitment (Glas, 2018) and more supplier loyalty (Prakash, 2011), mitigating dependency problems (Schiele and Vos, 2015), and, in particular, receiving:

- cost and pricing benefits (Hald et al., 2009; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2003; Moody, 2005; Patrucco et al., 2018; Schiele et al., 2011), which have been estimated at 2–4% (Bew, 2007) but may amount to values as high as 5–30% (Blenkhorn and Banting, 1991),
- innovation benefits and technology access (Ellis et al., 2012; Patrucco et al., 2018; Schiele et al., 2011) and
- delivery priorities (Bemelmans et al., 2015), such as operational benefits, including risk reduction (Hoffmann et al., 2017).

The above benefits are relative to the services or products that other customers receive. The unit of analysis here is a single supplier that serves several customers. Hence, by ensuring steady and cost efficient supply, achieving preferred customer status has an immediate operational resource mobilising component. Likewise, it embraces a strategic component, as it is about getting better access to supplier resources than competing buyers have (Pulles et al., 2016a). It is therefore essential for the buying company to mobilise supplier resources. Below, we discuss current insights from the literature on supplier resource mobilisation.

3. Supplier resource mobilisation – taking stock and directions for future research

Successful supplier resource mobilisation requires the management of a series of connected tasks. We propose that at least the following six stages are included in a successful supplier resource mobilisation process (see Fig. 1). We caution that the model should not be understood as a stage-gate type model with total separation between the steps. There may be overlaps (e.g., supplier-oriented actions can influence supplier satisfaction), and some of the stages can be executed in parallel. However, as a starting point, it is important to emphasise the sequence, with one step relying on the successful execution of the previous step. For example, it would be difficult for companies to achieve preferred customer status if their suppliers are not satisfied. In addition, there is no need to build customer attractiveness and segment suppliers if the organisation cannot ultimately capitalise on the resources from various suppliers.

The resource mobilisation process starts with (1) becoming an attractive customer, after which the company should (2) segment suppliers and decide which suppliers it wants to focus on in generating (3) supplier satisfaction and in (4) becoming a preferred customer. For suppliers willing to collaborate and offer preferential treatment, the buying company can (5) devise actions to engage with the supplier. Finally, (6) the buying company should be able integrate the supplier's resources and make use of them in its internal processes. The cyclical depiction of these stages relates to the process of continuously monitoring these stages and re-evaluating their effectiveness.

The cycle presents several areas for research. Below, we specify the steps to full supplier resource mobilisation and review some of the most important works dealing with one or more of these steps. We also discuss opportunities for future research.

3.1. Customer attractiveness

The mobilisation process starts with the buying company, which attracts the attention of key suppliers. Suppliers evaluate the attractiveness of their customer accounts by looking at the costs/rewards or value the buyers can create for them. Customer attractiveness enables the buying companies to mobilise the supplier's resources by inducing suppliers to try to work with them and make offers, either by pro-actively approaching companies, as in the case of innovations put forward by a supplier, or by responding to requests for buyer quotations with good offers. It is important to note that customer attractiveness refers both to attracting new suppliers to engage in new relationships and to being attractive to existing suppliers to intensify relationships. Because change is inevitable in the supply base, attractiveness evaluations should be a recurrent exercise (as depicted by the circular nature of our mobilisation chart in Fig. 1).

Customer attractiveness took off as a research area more than 15 years ago, following the observation of the reversed buyer-supplier logic in empirical studies (Christiansen and Maltz, 2002; Ellegaard et al., 2003; Harris et al., 2003), with some traces back to the concept of reverse marketing (Leenders and Blenkhorn, 1988). The managerial relevance of customer attractiveness was evidenced by the studies of Moody (2005) and Trent and Zacharia (2012) and by the studies on the supplier working relations index of North American automotive producers (e.g., Henke and Zhang, 2010). Challenging the notion of suppliers being narrowly interested in only the financial value of their customers, attractiveness research has established and measured a wide range of costs and rewards offered by buying companies (Hüttinger et al., 2012; La Rocca et al., 2012; Ramsay and Wagner, 2009; Tanskanen and Aminoff, 2015; Tóth et al., 2015). Attractiveness perceptions and elements can differ not just between buyer and supplier (Aminoff and Tanskanen, 2013) but also between the levels of organisational analysis (individual, group, organisation) in the buyer-supplier relationship (Mortensen et al., 2008), which creates an additional layer of managerial challenges when creating attractiveness (Hald, 2012). A few articles attempted to offer broader models of attractiveness (Ellegaard, 2012; Hald et al., 2009).

Several opportunities remain for customer attractiveness research. For instance, the literature is not very abundant on how to actively promote the buying company within the supply market. Cordón and Vollmann (2008) propose “ten golden rules for becoming an attractive customer” and detail their experience. However, many of their rules apply to ongoing buyer-supplier relationships. Especially for buying companies that are not well known among suppliers (e.g., due to limited volumes) or buying companies that are not aware of potential suppliers (e.g., due to many start-ups or technological developments), it is essential to signal attractiveness to suppliers. Future research could examine how companies can signal their particular needs to the supply market and contact new suppliers. For instance, in high-tech industries, companies may organise innovation contests to attract start-ups (Adamczyk et al., 2012).

Fig. 1. The stages of supplier resource mobilisation.

3.2. Segmenting suppliers

An analysis of customer attractiveness provides the buying company with a general understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in its supplier management. It points to areas for improvement, enabling the company to strengthen its performance relative to other buyers and assuring that suppliers in general look favourably upon the buying company. However, it may be that not all suppliers have the resources, capabilities or strategic intentions that fit the buying company's strategies. Therefore, supplier segmentation is required, which allows the buying company to recognise those (possibly few) suppliers with strategic resources that can assist the buying company in improving its competitive position. Specifically, for those relationships, the buying company should invest its time and develop supplier satisfaction. Or, in the words of [Cordón and Vollman \(2008, p. 58\)](#): "Attraction is not to be spread around like so much peanut butter. Identify which partnerships will pay off in the long term, and invest in them."

Supplier segmentation for resource mobilisation is very different from more conventional (commodity group) segmentation, such as the [Kraljic \(1983\)](#) matrix, in that it requires in-depth knowledge of specific suppliers. Such an approach aims at building collaborative rather than competitive relations. Innovation and product development-oriented PSM literature has offered several segmentation models that inform a supplier resource mobilisation logic, for example [Kamath and Liker's \(1994\)](#) model of supplier roles in product development, [Kaufman, Wood and Theyel's \(2000\)](#) collaboration/technology supplier typology, and [Svensson's \(2004\)](#) automotive supplier segmentation model. However, these articles tend to have a somewhat narrower aim on, for example, product development involvement or process optimisation, rather than a broader strategic resource mobilisation view.

Research on key supplier relationships has attempted to increase our understanding of an important breed of suppliers as well as how they interact with buying companies ([Ivens et al., 2009](#); [Ulaga and Eggert, 2006](#)). Inherent in this stream of research is an understanding of key suppliers as not just occupying one quadrant in a matrix but perhaps requiring individualised attention and effort from the buying company. One segmentation method would be to categorise suppliers into a preferred customer matrix ([Kumar and Routroy, 2016](#); [Schiele, 2012](#)). On the one axis, the status with the supplier is depicted, and on the other, the relevance of the supplier for the buying company is depicted. To develop an understanding of which suppliers truly matter, however, companies may need to develop a preferred supplier list, which requires a thorough supplier evaluation and classification, including the definition of strategic suppliers, which are by no means automatically the suppliers with the highest volumes ([Hald and Ellegaard, 2011](#)). A

logical consequence of supplier evaluation is the implementation of preferred supplier programmes. This perspective received relatively limited research attention ([Sieweke et al., 2012](#)), but would make up for an important cornerstone of effective supplier resource mobilisation.

3.3. Supplier satisfaction

Supplier satisfaction and customer attractiveness are closely related concepts. Although several studies on buyer-supplier relationships see these concepts as interchangeable ([Aminoff and Tanskanen, 2013](#); [Ellegaard et al., 2003](#)), other studies distinguish between the two ([Hald, 2012](#); [Pulles et al., 2016a](#); [Schiele et al., 2012](#)). In the latter perspective, supplier satisfaction is seen as a condition that is achieved if the quality of outcomes from a buyer-supplier relationship meets or exceeds the supplier's expectations ([Schiele et al., 2012, p. 1180](#)). Hence, whereas attractiveness refers to the expectations of a relationship, supplier satisfaction refers to how the supplier perceives the buyer's actual behaviour within the relationship ([Benton and Maloni, 2005](#); [Essig and Amann, 2009](#)). Supplier satisfaction practices can relate both to a more general supply-base oriented strategy, in which the buying company seeks to be a better customer for all of its suppliers (e.g., fair payment terms, trustworthiness), and to supplier-specific approaches (e.g., supplier development, top management involvement). Specifically, the latter requires dedicated efforts from the buying company, which explains why supplier satisfaction follows supplier segmentation in the resource mobilisation cycle.

Factors such as recommendations and sharing market information have been found to influence supplier satisfaction ([Ghijsen et al., 2010](#)). Likewise, supplier satisfaction can also be generated by avoiding certain behaviours, such as price reduction pressure and excessive or late specification changes ([Henke and Zhang, 2010](#)). Among the most prominent factors influencing supplier satisfaction are the profitability of the account, relational factors and operational excellence ([Vos et al., 2016](#)). A strong implication from supplier satisfaction research is that companies may benefit from using a supplier satisfaction analysis as a point of departure for developing their purchasing function ([Giacchetta and Marchetti, 2013](#)). Such an assessment may be an efficient way to draft an organisational development roadmap of the purchasing function.

Research is slowly progressing towards a more comprehensive understanding of supplier satisfaction, such as the impact of contingencies as dependency ([Caniëls et al., 2018](#); [Shanka and Buvik, 2019](#)) or the application to different contexts outside typical manufacturing industries, such as the defence industry (e.g., [Glas, 2018](#)). A particular

avenue for future research on supplier satisfaction would be its cultural embedding. For instance, in high power distance cultures, a different sensitivity to customer behaviour could be expected (Schiele et al., 2015).

3.4. Preferred customer status

Despite being an attractive customer and having generally satisfied suppliers, buying companies may still find themselves in a position where their status in the supplier organisation may not be good enough to motivate the supplier to allocate superior strategic resources towards them (Nollet et al., 2012). Buyers therefore benefit from understanding how key suppliers consider their customer portfolio and assign preferred customer status to obtain what has been coined “preferential resource allocation” or “preferred customer treatment” (Baxter, 2012; Pulles et al., 2016a), denoting the supplier's prioritised effort to invest in that particular exchange.

The notion of preferred customer status emerged relatively recently in the literature, despite sporadic older reports (Schiele et al., 2012). Traditionally, the assumption was that suppliers are available in abundance and willing to serve all customers equally (i.e., perfect factor mobility; Ramsay, 2001a, 2001b). However, observations in the automotive industry showed how Japanese newcomers with a different attitude towards suppliers created better access to supplier resources (Dyer, 1996). This led to the development of the relational view of the company, which argues that competitive advantage is derived from the combination of inter-company resources (Dyer and Singh, 1998). The core challenge is that there is often a scarcity of good suppliers (Cordón and Vollmann, 2008) and that not all suppliers are ready or willing to make significant investments and developmental efforts in a specific customer relationship (Pulles et al., 2016a). There is an important learning point in realising that supplier resource mobilisation is only partly done at the will of the buying company and may in some cases even be out of reach of deliberate buying company efforts. The extent to which suppliers base their evaluation on institutional aspects (e.g., profits, dependence) versus personal aspects (e.g., interpersonal trust, familiarity; Hüttinger et al., 2012; Pulles et al., 2016a; Ramsay and Wagner, 2009) is the subject of much debate.

There is an element of competition in obtaining preferred customer status. Buying companies are in competition with other customers in the supplier's portfolio for access to the supplier's resources. Supplier-oriented competition is essential for achieving buyer status improvements, but research explicitly addressing this phenomenon is scarce. A few studies in both the strategic management and PSM literature have touched upon this topic (Castellucci and Ertug, 2010; Dyer et al., 2018; Dyer and Hatch, 2006; Ellram et al., 2013; Markman et al., 2009; Takeishi, 2001), but studies explicitly focusing on upstream competition appear to be lacking. While traditionally, purchasing has often been seen as an act involving one buyer and one supplier, the preferred customer perspective draws attention to including in the act not only the dyad but also the supply network, which includes the other customers of a supplier (as well as the other potential suppliers of a buying company).

3.5. Supplier-oriented action

Once a buying company is a preferred customer of those suppliers that can help it gain competitive advantages, the company should capitalise on this. This requires actions to mobilise the supplier's resources. The PSM community has recognised the importance of supplier-oriented actions for value creation. Most research connected to the action stage has adopted the term supplier development. Several key operations management (OM) and PSM studies show that superior supplier development requires a buying company's active involvement that surpasses more common passive practices such as incentives or supplier evaluations (Krause et al., 2007; Wagner, 2006). Nevertheless,

direct involvement is associated with certain difficulties, in terms of creating and maintaining lasting access to suppliers' resources (Handfield et al., 2000; Hartley and Jones, 2006; Helper and Kiehl, 2004).

Detailed insights into the actions of buying companies can be found outside the OM/PSM field, with a high number of contributions investigating the (best) practices of Japanese automotive OEMs, aimed at creating a lean supply base. In particular, the investigations headed by Helper (Helper and Kiehl, 2004; MacDuffie and Helper, 1997), Sako (2004, 1996) and Dyer (Dyer, 1997; Dyer and Hatch, 2006) have provided in-depth insights into mobilisation actions. Successful actions include engineering visits at supplier facilities, knowledge-sharing initiatives, supplier assistance, training, joint problem solving, and personnel transfer (MacDuffie and Helper, 1997; Sako, 2004, 1996). Such actions are typically supported by specific investments in the supplier, open knowledge sharing, strong relationships, and an almost institutionalised organisational setup (Dyer, 1997; MacDuffie and Helper, 1997). It should be noted that many of the above studies build on a sample of large multinationals, frequently taking supplier interest and willingness for granted, essentially jumping straight into the action part without considering customer attractiveness and preferred customer status to be preceding managerial stages.

Other researchers study supplier-oriented actions in contexts that lack the advantage of a large multinational as a starting point and argue that actors in relationships have limited autonomy in mobilising resources from their counterparts (Cantù et al., 2012; Snehota and Håkansson, 1995). Buyer and supplier jointly combine their resources in an interactive process. Since a supplier's interest and effort is not evident in buyer-supplier relationships, buying companies need to take charge and frame initiatives or projects that secure a high level of value-creating interaction but also keep suppliers involved in the process (Holmen et al., 2007). Maintaining supplier resource mobilisation over time is a challenge. Collaborative action has a high likelihood of dissolving (Hartley and Jones, 2006; Helper and Kiehl, 2004). Supplier-oriented actions therefore require a structured process and initiatives that set the structure for a collaborative process with a specific focus on joint value creation (Baraldi, 2012; Holmen et al., 2007). Distributive fairness (Praxmarer-Carus et al., 2013) and trust (Nagati and Rebolledo, 2013) play an important role in this process.

3.6. Supplier resource integration

Managing the first mobilisation stages effectively brings the buying company very close to successful supplier resource mobilisation. With a willing and capable supplier, the next stage is that the buying company itself ensures that it is capable of actually integrating the supplier's resources in its value-creating process. This stage again turns the focus to the internal processes of the buying company. Several studies have shown how companies can struggle to integrate resources. For example, Pardo et al. (2011) provide evidence for certain barriers within the buying company that hinder key supplier management. Specifically, their study documents problems with purchasing managers 1) evaluating and understanding their supplier portfolio, 2) adopting the logic of collaborative value creation, and 3) integrating other relevant functions in an aligned effort relative to suppliers. In product development, the “not invented here syndrome”, which prevents the use of external knowledge, is a widely researched problem (Hussinger and Wastyn, 2016).

The literature reveals challenges internal to the buying company that hinder supplier resource integration, for instance, a lack of functional integration (Ellegaard and Koch, 2012; Henke and Zhang, 2010). Internal hindrances for supplier resource mobilisation can also be encountered further up in the organisation in the form of inadequate support from top management (Emberson and Storey, 2006). Top management support is closely connected to internal measurement and monitoring systems, which should fit a strategy of supplier resource

mobilisation (Pardo et al., 2011). A lack of purchasing support in the buying organisation can, in extreme cases, lead to supplier deception, where one organisational function initiates supplier collaboration, but another obstructs it (Ellegaard and Koch, 2012). Research also points to the importance of developing certain boundaries spanning organisational capabilities, roles and job positions to ensure that managers have the competencies and knowledge required for mobilising supplier resources (Ivens et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2015). Failing to remove internal barriers for supplier resource mobilisation can occur when outdated strategies and structures (e.g., focusing on savings and competitive supplier pressure) have not been substituted with a new PSM strategy (Rossetti and Choi, 2005).

Having progressed successfully through the above stages, the buying company should be in a position to mobilise key suppliers' resources to strengthen its competitive advantage (Fig. 1). The arrow feeding back into customer attractiveness highlights the need for regularly repeating the process to adapt to changes and maintain competitive advantage. This points to another direction for future research. Longitudinal views on the resource mobilisation process are scarce. The strategies and actions of competitors, suppliers and the buying company itself, as well as external changes, all affect this process over time. Examining resource mobilisation processes over time would therefore yield many interesting insights.

4. Articles in this special topic forum

The development of the three articles in this special topic forum originated at a workshop at Aarhus University in October 2017. Of the fifteen papers presented there, six papers were invited into the Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management review process, of which three were selected for this special topic forum. These articles are interconnected by their shared focus on the different ways buying companies can develop their suppliers, including the suppliers' perception of the buying company. As such, the theoretical frameworks presented in the articles are all rooted in the literature on buyer-supplier relationships and social exchange theory. At the same time, the articles differ in the methods applied and empirical settings studied. Altogether, this makes for interesting new insights into the topic of resource mobilisation and the supplier resource mobilisation cycle.

Wadell et al. (2019) present an extreme case, namely, that of customer attractiveness in the case of bankruptcy. Although a bankrupt customer is arguably the least attractive customer of all, this case describes a bankrupt customer that nonetheless was able to continue mobilising supplier resources. Like the other articles, that from Wadell et al. (2019) is concerned with the general question of how customers can influence the perceptions and actions of their suppliers in their favour. In contrast to the other authors, Wadell et al. (2019) examine attractiveness and resource mobilisation in the late stages of relationships. Using a qualitative case study of the bankruptcy of the former Swedish car manufacturer SAAB Automobile, the authors study the role of customer attractiveness in the period from when bankruptcy was declared until the 480,000 square-metre manufacturing facility could be sold. To maintain the value of the facility during this period, it was important to convince key suppliers to keep delivering to this no longer very attractive customer. The results of the study show that suppliers whose resources were adapted to the customer continued to perceive the bankruptcy estate as an attractive customer. Furthermore, the authors show that both experience- and expectation-based attractiveness exist in relationship ending and that the latter is particularly important for maintaining overall attractiveness in the eyes of suppliers in cases of bankruptcy. Expectations, hence, may be a very important element of upstream marketing to be purposefully managed and created to keep attractiveness.

The second article concentrates on another step in the mobilisation cycle, supplier satisfaction. Glavee-Geo (2019) focuses on creating and maintaining supplier satisfaction by analysing the effects of supplier

development from the supplier's perspective. Starting in social exchange theory, he explores the question of whether supplier development activities increase supplier satisfaction and whether satisfaction results in relationship continuity, often seen as an important aim of relationship development. Based on survey data from micro-to small-sized commodity suppliers in the Ghanaian cocoa industry, the analysis shows that supplier development activities have a positive effect on supplier performance as well as on supplier satisfaction. This article distinguishes between economic and non-economic satisfaction, and the results show that both of these must be present in order for supplier satisfaction to lead to relationship continuity. Furthermore, supplier development activities also predict relationship continuity. Interestingly, supplier development is shown to increase economic and non-economic supplier satisfaction and relationship continuation not only with poorly performing suppliers where there is much room for improvement but also leads to positive results with high performing suppliers.

The third article addresses a later stage in the mobilisation cycle. Pihlajamaa, Kaipia, Aminoff, and Tanskanen (2019) address the question of how buyers can gain access to innovations from their suppliers by presenting a specific set of actions a buyer can undertake. Taking as their starting point the relational view, they conceptualise three conditions that must be met in order for buyers to be able to benefit from supplier innovation. First, the supplier must be innovative. Second, supplier innovations must be relevant to the buyer, and finally, the supplier must be willing to share relevant innovations with the buyer. The authors suggest the concept of stimulation of supplier innovation to understand the ways in which buyers may enhance supplier innovativeness and guide and encourage suppliers to share their innovations, hence improving the three conditions. Based on a qualitative, multiple case study of manufacturing companies in Nordic countries, the authors analyse stimulation methods as a matter of knowledge-sharing routines and the effective governance of supplier relationships. One interesting insight is that the majority of supplier stimulation seen in the cases studied relies on indirect as opposed to direct methods, meaning that innovation outcomes are reliant on suppliers' voluntary actions and cannot be directly activated by the buying company. With these insights, this article enhances our understanding of an unexplored phase in supplier relationships, and their discussion of the customer attractiveness concept complements the other two articles in this issue well.

Together, the articles in this special topic forum provide new insights into the processes and outcomes of supplier resource mobilisation. At the same time, there are many other promising paths that remain unexplored, of which several are discussed in this editorial. Therefore, we hope that this special topic forum will stimulate further research on the processes that help buying companies to mobilise supplier resources.

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