

The Relationship Between Marketing and Purchasing in Business - to - Business Markets

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Abstract

The paper stresses the relevance of the relationship between marketing and purchasing in companies acting in business-to-business markets. The paper develops an analysis of business marketing and purchasing literature on the topic of the relationship between marketing and purchasing. Two pilot case studies are reported to enter into the detail of this relationship in companies. The aim is to understand the antecedents sub-standing marketing and purchasing relationships in companies and enter into the substance of such a relationship, into its benefits and problems.

Key words: Marketing Function, Purchasing Function, Organization, Relationships

1. Introduction

It is recognized that in business-to-business markets one of the most important topic is related to organizational issues (Håkansson et *al.*, 1979). It is almost agreed in literature on the fact that in business markets a small number of close, complex, long-term relationships account for a large percentage of inter-organizational business (Håkansson, Snehota, 1995; Turnbull et *al.*, 1996), and that these strategic relationships have necessitated a move from traditional transactional exchanges to more interactive, longer-term partnership relationships that ultimately lead to an increase of the value created (Morgan, Hunt, 1994; Blankenburg et *al.*, 1999; Sahay, 2003; Ulaga, Eggert, 2006; Pinnington, Scallon, 2009).

It has been observed how, in this context, little attention has been paid to the problem of the impact of the external changing organizational context into the internal configuration of the firm (Ivens et *al.*, 2009). In substance, greater consideration has been addressed just to the inside-out organizational processes, but little attention has been dedicated to intra-organizational questions. Which are the role and the organization of marketing when a company's market mainly consists of a set of limited business relationships with a few

customers? Which impact the variety of business exchange relationships and their interconnections have on the company's internal marketing processes? How do they affect company's inter-functional relationships? These questions are sometimes conceptually debated by literature (Webster, 1997; Day, 1997), but limitedly empirically faced by focalized research.

Even if marketing literature emphasizes the importance of lean enterprise and the fall of the barriers among functional departments towards a greater interaction among different functional activities and towards forms of business process management (Achrol, 1991; Moller, Rajala, 1999), a few research is devoted to enter specifically into the fall of such barriers and into the investigation of the specific determinants and forms of the relationship of marketing with other functional units. Very little attention is in particular dedicated to the implications that a company's focus on customer satisfaction in a value supply perspective have on intra-organizational relationship between marketing and purchasing.

In our perspective, the variety of interactions and interdependencies between customers and suppliers in business markets (Håkansson, Snehota, 1995) should lead to a higher consideration by researchers of the impact on the strategic role, organization capabilities and performance of the marketing and purchasing functions and on the relationship between these two departments within the firm.

Both are the typical "boundary functions", being marketing the interface between the company and the downstream market and being purchasing the interface between the company and the upstream market. The little attention dedicated to the relationship between marketing and purchasing is thus partially motivated by their traditional view at the opposite side of the company. It is also motivated by the empirical observation of the scarce dialogue between marketing and purchasing personnel in companies where it seems that the two functions are very distant to each other. However looking deeply at company's business market processes it emerges the relevance of a greater interaction between marketing and purchasing.

The paper presented here wants to analyze the prevailing literature on the topic of the relationship between marketing and purchasing in companies acting in industrial markets aiming at clarifying some questions concerning the relationship between marketing and purchasing in business markets and entering into the details of such a relationship.

In section 2 we motivate the importance of considering the relationship between marketing and purchasing in industrial markets. In section 3 we shall analyze the major contributions developed in business marketing and purchasing literature on the issues of the

organization of the marketing function and its relations with other functions, purchasing in particular (section 3.1) as well as the same aspects are debated in relation to the purchasing function (section 3.2). In section 4, we report on an explorative research analysis on two companies of the mechanical sector and in the final section we develop some final reflections on the antecedents and on the specific characteristics of marketing and purchasing relationships.

2. The importance of the relationship between marketing and purchasing

In order to start debating the importance of the relationship between marketing and purchasing, let us tell you a story.

Do you remember *Matrix* movies, the trilogy by Wachowski brothers, in which Neo and companies fight against “Matrix”, the artificial intelligence that controls the life of the entire humanity? In the second episode “Matrix reloaded”, there is a spectacular scene that takes place in the highway, in which Trinity, one of the protagonists, rides a *Ducati 996*, the famous Italian motorbike. The scene is very long and the Ducati brand is clearly visible for a lot of times (as the agreement with Ducati imposed). The scene has been used as one of the primary trailers to launch the movie all over the world (you can easily find the scene on the web by searching “Matrix and Ducati” on Google).

It was a great success for the movie.

A great success for Ducati too? Yes, a great success from the marketing point of view, but no business for Ducati; more, a failure from a business perspective.

Just few days after the exit of the movie in the cinemas, Ducati’s dealers have been pressed by a lot of requests of *Ducati 996* motorbikes! Just a problem: all of them were looking exactly for the “*Ducati matrix motorbike, the green one that Trinity rides in the movie*”. The dealers had to answer: “*Sorry, there’s not that green among available colours in Ducati offering, and no green at all!*”.

Ducati immediately implemented a sort of emergency strategy to fill the gap and catch the emergent opportunity. Many problems arose in this process. The motorbike employed in the movie was a unique piece realized for the specific purpose. Even if the uniqueness of the piece was just related to the colour, a special green requested by the movie’s directors (that evokes the colour prevailing in the movie), Ducati’s purchasing department and the suppliers of the company that created the special bike for the movie, were not prepared to face such a

situation in a short time. More, the purchasing department was not involved in anyway in the previous process and marketing people were the only involved in the project with no precise idea of the time needed to synchronize and co-ordinate the “supply side” of Ducati to fast produce and deliver the green motorbike. Timing to activate the supply chain was longer than expected and when Ducati was finally able to satisfy the demand, too long time had passed and the consumers were no more interested in buying the motorbike. A great opportunity had been lost. In the same time negative effects on the marketing department and activities occurred.

The story underlines that the relationship between marketing and purchasing activities is not just important in terms of synchronization of the operational activities – i.e. the implementation of the so-called *transfer ability*, the capacity to transfer the product or service in the way that meet the objectives and constraints of the customers. The relationship between marketing and purchasing, in terms of communication processes, information exchanges, interaction, is more and more significant also in relation to the improvement of the company’s *problem-solving ability*, the capacity to fully satisfy customer’s needs, to solve users’ problems, to improve their performances (Ford et al., 2002).

In order to explain this last point we have another story of a small high-tech company (*Building Automation-Italy*) acting in the automation sector, specialized in the domotic business and realizing customized hardware-software solutions for both firms and final customers. A business customer, asked for a specific solution in order to improve and customize the security system of his small company. The marketing responsible alone had some meetings with the customer in order to better understand his requests and to formalize an offering. Just after this the purchasing responsible, strictly working with internal software developers, has been involved in the process and started to look for some suppliers (hardware and software suppliers) that fit the customers’ requests. The problem was that the customer’s requests were actually the requests that the marketing responsible reported to the purchasing people that had to coordinate the solution development process. The result was that when the solution was almost finished the customer complained that the final result was not really the expected one: some adjustments were not necessary and some others were completely absent. Just after this, company viewed the importance to involve the purchasing responsible in a new (time and money consuming!) solution development processes that implied the direct and contextual rapport between marketing department, purchasing department and the customer. The problem-solving ability of the company under analysis has been actually reached and

improved when purchasing people and marketing people started working together in order to solve an emergent problem experienced with one customer.

The importance of the relationship between marketing and purchasing can be connected to a third rationale: it supports the company' strategic positioning. Let's take the example of an Italian large mechanical company that has delocalized part of the production in India in order to product a line of low price products specific for the Indian market. Marketing department had put into light the advantages of such a strategy to capture a large emerging market and gradually transforming the Indian factory in a centre of production for the company's low positioning products. The company started such a venture in India but difficulties soon became numerous and more than expected especially due to the development of an effective and efficient supply network in India, capable to respond to the market strategy. In India suppliers were not so easy to find, especially competent as in Italy. On their part many Italian suppliers were not dispoable to offshore in India. Again a scarce dialogue and joint planning between the marketing and purchasing department and among marketing managers and supplier managers caused problems to the rapid implementation of an important market strategy.

The three business stories put into light the importance to consider the relationship between marketing and purchasing as critic in terms of implantation of the company's transfer ability, problem solving ability and positioning strategy.

From the theoretical point of view some researchers in the field of business marketing have recently devoted their attention to analyse to the motivations subtending the importance of the relationship between marketing and purchasing observing that the latter is both inevitable and beneficial (Piercy, 2009; Sheth et al., 2009). Sheth, Sharma and Iyer (2009) examine the relationship between marketing and purchasing as a result of the shift from product-to capability-focused commerce. The authors point out that marketing and purchasing departments has to become closer for two main reasons: the first is related to the fact that marketers become solution oriented rather than product focused and they thus will need to source products and services from third parties vendors with a consequent and inevitable deeper involvement of the purchasing department. The second reason is connected with the emergence of customer-centric marketing coupled with build-to-order manufacturing, which will lead to a better alignment of marketing and purchasing to deliver solutions to customers. As a consequence, authors stress that marketing and purchasing direct relationship inside companies' must be reconsidered. Piercy as well (2009), considers increasingly strategic the direct relation between marketing and purchasing departments in companies acting in BtoB

contexts, especially to align strategic customer relationship management processes with supplier relationship management processes and both of these with the management of collaboration and joint ventures with third parties.

This relationship alignment is considered necessary to connect customer needs to complex technical solutions, often involving customized products. According to the author, the intra-organizational consequences are considerable: it is necessary the development of strategic internal relationships between the groups responsible for managing customer relationships (marketing and sales, strategic account managers and so on), for managing supplier relationships (purchasing function, key supplier managers and so on) and collaboration (alliance management). It is thus necessary an internal partnering between the boundary-spanning functions that have direct impact on the delivery of value to the customer.

Taking the purchasing literature on its part, it is stressed the importance of the relationship between purchasing and marketing in companies playing in business markets (Dubois, Winstra, 2005; Fung *et al.*, 2008). Great contributions in this direction stem from SCM (Supply Chain Management) literature (Lambert, Cooper, 2000; Jüttner *et al.*, 2007; Bals *et al.*, 2009), especially when it is recognized that the supply chain moves to create value in the eye of the customer who is the one who activates the supply chain and to which supply chain processes are directed. In particular, Jüttner, Christopher and Baker (2007) discuss the benefits of the integration between marketing and supply chain management and highlight how the companies which effectively link their customer and supply chain operations gain competitive advantage by differentiating not only customer-needs based products and services, but also the underlying delivery processes.

The same concept of demand chain management emphasizes the synergies between marketing and purchasing (Heikkilä, 2002). As it is necessary for companies to adjust rapidly, effectively and efficiently supply to meet customers' specific requirements, some authors emphasize that marketing should become responsible for supply management too (Sheth *et al.*, 2001). Others argue that supply chain management in companies should be responsible for all the processes directed to create and deliver value propositions to customers (Kumar *et al.*, 2000). In summary, supply chain management literature quite extensively emphasize the need for integration with marketing, even if the study of the specific modalities and intra-organizational consequences of such integration are quite neglected.

To sum up, taking both marketing and purchasing literature, except for the awareness of the importance of the relationship between marketing and purchasing, little attention has been paid to the related organizational issues.

3. Literature on business marketing and purchasing organizational issues

The limited analysis of the relationship between marketing and purchasing as well as of the relationship between marketing and other functional units is to be considered within the general limited analysis of the intra-organizational issues in marketing and purchasing literature.

3.1 Literature on the marketing side

Several authors in business marketing literature recognize that organizing marketing activities in ways that fit the implementation requirements of a business strategy, enhance performance and is crucial to long term survival (Andersson, 2000; Vorhies, Morgan, 2003). It is emphasized that the organization of marketing function and activities covers a primary role in strategy formulation and implementation in companies playing in business markets (Håkansson, Ostberg, 1975; Slater, Olson, 2001).

In particular, according to Harris and Ogbonna (2003) we can distinguish two main streams of literature in business marketing literature on organizational topics. The first deals with the issue of marketing as one of the functional units in the firm, which has a clearly defined *functional specialization* (Ruekert et al. 1985; Achrol, 1991, 1997; Achrol, Kotler, 1999). The second adopts a more *process oriented* perspective on marketing organization taking into account a set of activities that marketing carries out as the typical firm's function that regulates the exchanges with markets (Anderson, 1982; Piercy, 1986; Piercy, Morgan, 1989; Day, 1997; Webster, 1997; Workman et al., 1998).

The attention is focused on the fact that monitoring continuously the market, dealing with a lot of market interfaces, interacting and creating value with them are key activities of the marketing function and that these activities are often not located in a single functional unit but rather dispersed across the organization with multiple actors involved in them (Day, 1997; Webster et al., 2005).

In this direction a growing body of literature focused on the topic of cross-functional interaction between marketing and other departments, as a tool to move towards a renewed approach to marketing organization within firm's boundaries (Ruekert, Walker, 1987a; Workman et al., 1998; Kahn, Mentzer, 1998; Houston et al., 2001).

Wind (2005) argues that there is a need now to increase cross-functional perspectives in management research and practice. He puts into light how “*marketing, at the interface between the organization and the environment, can provide new opportunities for value creation and growth. It should be a concern to the entire organization. Marketing provides opportunities by identifying opportunities to serve unmet needs of current customers or new customers for the company’s current and new products and services. A focus on growth requires an integrated approach, cutting across the organizational functions and activities*” (Wind, 2005, p. 866). Moreover, he highlights that there is still debate about whether the organization needs a marketing department, as a centre of expertise, or the work should be more thoroughly diffused, but that, in the same time, there is a clear need to apply marketing insights more broadly. The author recovers in the reshape of organizational architecture and in the implementation of processes to ensure cross-functional integration, the enablers in making marketing an engine for growth.

In this stream of literature a perspective based on the dyadic relations between marketing and other departments is prevailing. Studies have addressed the integration of marketing with *finance* (de Ruyter, Wetzels, 2000; Zinkhan, Verrbrugge, 2000), *R&D* (Gupta et al. 1986; Ruekert, Walker, 1987b; Song et al., 1996; Song, Thieme, 2006; Massey, Kyriazis, 2007; Leenders, Wierenga, 2008), *sales* (Dewsnapp, Jobber, 2000, 2002; Dawes, Massey, 2005), *manufacturing* (Olson, 1993; Narasimhan, Das, 2001).

Some of these studies have been mainly concerned with the problem of internal communication, market knowledge sharing, cooperation and co-ordination between marketing and different functional units recognizing that a good integration between marketing and such departments is essential for the success of marketing programs and company’s positioning (De Luca, Atuahene-Gima, 2007; Rolland, Kaminska-Labbé, 2008). Some others emphasize the different level of competition/conflict or collaboration between marketing and other departments (Bondra, Davis, 1996; Luo et al., 2006).

However, in this field of studies the marketing and R&D interface remains the most extensively researched dyad within the specific context of the new product development process. Moreover, we observe the emphasis on the key role of the organization of the marketing function in firm’s strategy and business development, but with a lack of attention on the translation of these concepts into some more useful and effective *organizational devices* in business marketing literature.

3.2 Literature on the purchasing side

Some degree of attention has been paid in the last years to the organizational issues of the purchasing function. In particular, since the end of the nineties a great number of scholars have stressed that purchasing is becoming increasingly strategic in companies (Lamming, Cox, 1995; Hardt et al., 2007).

Some scholars taking a perspective of purchasing as a company's function stresses that from the organizational point of view this function is evolving from a clerical function to a strategic one (Pearson, Gritzmaker, 1990; Spekman et al., 1994; Cox, Hines, 1997). In this respect they write that purchasing has an increasing important role in business companies development underling the changing organizational emergencies involved (Pearson, 1999). In particular, the issue of whether the function should be centralised or decentralised has been studied. In this respect has been stressed that purchasing department evolves including more and more strategic activities, increasingly critical capabilities of the people involved, the higher level procurement officer as critical to organizational effectiveness (Gadde, Håkansson, 2001; Trent, 2004; Axelsson et al., 2005; Monczka et al., 2005).

Other scholars starting from the approach above, rather than debating on the functional view of purchasing as a primarily service department responsible for the efficient management of the workflow of goods and services supporting the manufacturing activities, concentrates on a view of purchasing as a strategic process (Cousins, 1992; Cousins, Spekman, 2003). It is emphasized how in today's competitive environment many firms source a large percentage of their parts and components. That means that, from an organizational point of view the purchasing department is becoming more and more crucial in relation to the inter-organizational relationships with suppliers. Supplier Relationship Management (SRM) in relation to company's strategy formulation and goals achievement is considered central in some studies (Moeller et al., 2006). In the last few years emerged in several purchasing organisations the Key Supplier Manager (KSM) function. The role consists of managing relationships with suppliers that the company has identified as strategic (Massirilian, Calvi, 2004).

This process view is developed by literature when it sees the increasing cross-functional nature of sourcing decision process especially in new product development context (Trent, Monczka, 1994; Trent 1996; Trent, 2004). Suppliers are an increasingly important resource for manufacturers and provide materials and services that constitute a majority of the cost of many new products; in addition suppliers may provide innovative product and process technologies that are critical to the development effort (Handfield et al., 1999). In this respect,

as argued by Moses and Åhlström (2008), since supply network structures are often complex, including resources and suppliers in many different combinations, sourcing decisions have become more cross-functionally oriented to gain a more holistic view of the decisions' effects. It is thus very important the cross-functional interaction of purchasing function with other departments (Pearson, 1999; Dubois, Winstra, 2005; Bals et al. 2009).

Literature on supply chain management, taking a more holistic perspective of company's business processes aiming at generating and distributing value to customers, suggests company's organizational solutions that concentrate marketing management and supplier management in the same department (Kumar et al., 2000). In general within this literature the issue of the integration between marketing and other departments stems from the implicitly assumed process-oriented view in this field of studies (Bregman, 1995; Ellinger, 2000; Christopher, Payne, 2002; Jüttner et al., 2007; Palmer, Wong, 2007).

But again, in this respect has been argued by Persson and Håkansson (2009) that maybe something is missing in Supply Chain Management literature too, in relation to specific intra-organizational issues. In particular, taking a purchasing side perspective, they point out the room for *“research where the organization within the companies – both regarding purchasing and marketing – is systematically related to how the external organizing together with suppliers and customers are designed or approached”* (Persson, Håkansson, 2009, pp. 11-12).

4. The “blurred boundaries” between marketing and purchasing in two Italian mechanical companies

We have emphasized the growing importance of the relationship between marketing and purchasing. In the same time we have shown how little attention has been dedicated to this issue in business marketing and purchasing literature. We have thus suggested that there is room for further research on this topic and, above all, the need for more focalized empirical investigation. In this direction, we are interested at investigating the possible “organizational settings” in which the relationship between marketing and purchasing emerges in business companies.

In this phase of the research process we have addressed this topic by developing two pilot case studies of two business companies acting in the mechanical sector in Italy (SCM and Schnell). We have conducted some interviews to managers in each company, aiming at

better understanding the “state of the art” in relation to the key purchasing and marketing activities and to the modalities that the two companies adopt to conceive and implement them, trying to focalize on their more or less apparent interaction’s nature.

SCM was born in 1965 and is specialized in the construction of woodworking machineries in a geographical area that has an historical concentration of important Italian furniture companies (Rimini, centre of Italy). The growth of the company was rapid in the 1980s and was accompanied by an acquisition strategy, finalized to control all the technologies involved in the production processes of their customers: wood, stone, glass and metal working technologies for furniture and house-frames producers. SCM is one of the leading companies in woodworking machineries production competing internationally with just two competitors (one German and one Italian). During years the company chose to maintain all production activities in Italy. This has been considered a basic strategy with respect to the demand expressed by emerging markets, even those presenting very different features from the traditional ones. In this respect the Italian network of suppliers is considered one of the most important leverage for the “made in Italy” image in foreign countries. This is very important if we consider that around the 70% of the value of the sold product is made by suppliers. SCM accounts for around 35 commercial subsidiaries all over the world.

The company offers a complete range of solutions for its customers that need to process complex and variable production phases in a customized way. To accomplish this task SCM is organized internally in 5 main Business Units (BUs) responsible each for different range of products: BU *Components* (mechanical components), BU *Minimax* (small and more standardized machines for artisans), BU *SCM* (woodworking machineries-high segment), BU *Furniture* (woodworking machinery-lower market segment), BU *Housing* (machineries for houses’ frames production and working). The 5 BUs cross, in a matrix organizational structure, 4 Technological Units (TUs) each of them specialized in different technological components, material, process and solutions. The managers and personnel of 3 of the TUs are located and structured near to or into the 3 main production sites in Italy. A *Marketing Office* and a *Purchasing Office* are present and they are positioned “out” of the matrix organization. They are in staff position in respect to the general manager, serving in a centralized mode the whole BUs and TUs activities and operations.

Main strategic marketing activities that interviewed people have declared to perform in the company are *market analysis*, *marketing research*, *market segmentation*, *market positioning*, *sales management*. These activities however are not performed by the Marketing

Office; rather, each business unit's general manager is responsible for them; any decisional process concerning these activities is developed in tight interaction with the responsible of the Technological Unit (TU), who own the knowledge necessary to understand which solutions can be developed and distributed. The result is the development of an annual Business Plan that contains all the relevant phases in relation to market objectives and strategies.

On the purchasing side, main purchasing activities concern *purchasing market analysis, suppliers' portfolio management, suppliers' selection and evaluation*. Such activities are mostly performed by the TU's manager in concert with BUs' managers. We may say that the Technological Unit plays as important interface between marketing and purchasing decisions, and that customer's value creation stems from a process in which purchasing and marketing activities are naturally connected and interrelated.

If we adopt a strict functional view and look at the activities carried out by Marketing and Purchasing centralized Offices we found that they are responsible for executive tasks and procedures: the purchasing office is responsible for handling supply administrative procedures and orders; the marketing office is responsible for fairs' organization, catalogues' design and development.

Purchasing personnel dialogues and interacts with TUs' managers only; Marketing personnel dialogues and interacts with BUs' Directors. No contacts take place between the Marketing office and the Purchasing office.

Schnell was founded in 1962 and it has developed its activity in the early 1980s thanks to the reorganization of the construction sector characterized by the development of large multinational companies in iron and steel commercialization; these companies pursued a vertical downstream integration, offering finished products that were before processed by hand with rudimentary machines by workers in the building sites. In this case too, we face the growth of the company in the 1980s that was mainly finalized to ensure to customers a complete range of solutions for the "automation" of their production processes: processing and assembling for large rebar-processing companies. Schnell is competing with two competitors (one Italian and one German/Danish). Schnell covers the 20% of the market with an average sales' rate of growth of 30% in the last four years. The company accounts for 8 productive sites (6 in Italy, one in Brazil and one in China), one software company in Spain, 5 "service" companies working as small productive and logistics centres, and around 30 agents and importers that are also responsible for assistance and post-sales services in the major international markets. The company has always based its competitiveness on Research &

Development and innovation activities (123 patents registered from 1987 in Europe and abroad) that lead to serve in a customized way a great variety of customers all over the world asking for particular features, linked for example to different building safety standards or different construction technologies. In the case under analysis we found a very similar situation to that of the above-described SCM case, even if the formal structural organization of the company is different (a typical functional organization model).

The company is organized into 5 main departments under the line of CEO: *Commercial and Sales, Administrative, Technical Unit, Production and Logistics. Quality, Accounting, EDI* are staff departments of the CEO. Formal *Marketing and Purchasing Functions* are positioned under the line of the Commercial and Logistics departments respectively. Again, as in the previous case, we found that what companies considers strategic marketing activities, i.e. market analysis, customer segmentation and customer satisfaction analysis are carried out by the CEO and responsible of the Commercial and Sales Department (that is the same person in the company). This person develops such activities with the support the manager in charge of the Technical Unit (TU), especially as concern customer satisfaction analysis. The TU general manager is the main responsible for the design and engineering of the product, for testing the prototypes as well as the all finished machines, for the technical assistance, maintenance and any post-sale services. The TU is *de facto* responsible for most of the strategic purchasing activities, i.e., supplier selection and vendor rating. In fact the TU is the centre of knowledge of the product; as the product is to be constantly innovated and customized, the TU controls the knowledge over the customer needs and over the suppliers' offer.

If we take into account the Purchasing Function, that is dependent on the Logistics department, it addresses just administrative activities such as MRP scheduling, orders' control, selection of suppliers of commodities. Jointly with the Logistics department, it depends on, the purchasing manager collaborates with the Technical Unit in relation to some purchasing activities such as suppliers' rating and quality control. On its part, the Marketing function, which is dependent on the Commercial department, is in charge of operational activities such as the organization of fairs and exhibition, the design of catalogues, the arrangement of communication events and of the invitation of customers to the company's factory.

5. Final reflections

The cases of SCM and Schnell, that we have briefly described above, put into light what is mainly observed in business marketing and purchasing literature: marketing and purchasing activities are increasingly spread out among several organizational units, forming intricate networks of marketing and purchasing streams of activities. Complex matrix organizations, inter-functional teams, customers or supplier management systems as well as a variety of business process management, are gradually replacing functional departments.

In companies acting in business-to-business contexts that show a great customer orientation, as the two companies we have previously analyzed, the relationship between marketing and purchasing activities is connatural with the prevailing customer driven processes.

In particular, it emerges that strategic marketing and purchasing activities are constantly crossing and interfacing throughout the organization according to a unique aim and perspective: to develop a customer value proposition that, on the one side, encounters the needs of the customers and, on the other side, takes account of the opportunities and the burdens connected to the resources that the company is able to activate and mobilize as well as of the costs connected to them. Marketing and purchasing, strictly defined within the boundary of the formal organizational functions, mostly perform executive and clerical activities and in this respect have not many reasons to be connected to each other.

We can conclude observing that adopting a “functional/structural perspective” on the relationship between marketing and purchasing in business markets, just focalized on the specific activities performed by the formal marketing and purchasing departments, should lead to a misunderstanding of the actual relationship between marketing and purchasing.

In fact, focusing on the functional view we have to conclude that no relationship occurs between marketing and purchasing nor, looking at the activities they perform, we find a reason to the existence of such a relationship.

If we take a “process perspective” and refer to marketing and purchasing as a set of varied activities, we observe a distribution of such activities among different units and different responsible for them; in this perspective, we observe intense relationships among marketing and purchasing activities. Probably any company, depending on its own business and level of customer orientation, will have different types of interaction between marketing and purchasing as well as different organizational solutions explaining such interaction.

For future research we suggest to study the possible variety and, in particular, the different “organizational modes” of the relationship between marketing and purchasing in b-to-b companies. The aim is to understand the antecedents explaining the variety and the different substance and intensity of the relationship between marketing and purchasing in its different organizational forms.

We expect to find out different situations that can be summarized as follows: from simplest *Exchanging* situations (where the relationship between marketing and purchasing is restricted to sporadic transactions), moving towards *Interacting* relations (when many episodes of exchange take place in a regular way), through *Interfacing* states (when the relationship is reinforced and mediated by inter-functional teams and other organizational unit that guarantee continuity, interdependence and continuous interaction between marketing and purchasing activities), to *Integrating* settings (when decisional processes concerning marketing and purchasing develop jointly, also thanks to an unique responsible of both the functions).

The prevalence of one or another situation and the connected variety of organizational solutions in different companies and business contexts could be useful to provide some managerial considerations that help the companies to fruitfully grasp the opportunities and threats linked both to the organizational design of the marketing and purchasing activities and to the managing of the existing and potential relationship between them.

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