SHAPING RELATIONSHIPS WITH BUSINESS PARTNERS IN THE OPINION OF ENTERPRISE EMPLOYEES

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Purpose: The aim of the study is to answer the questions: how the employees of enterprises evaluate the care for building proper relationships with suppliers, recipients, customers and other entities, the enterprise/organization cooperates with, what activities support building good relationships.

Design/methodology/approach: Empirical research conducted among respondents from enterprises and organizations in the Lubuskie voivodship. The background was to show the essence and models of relationship marketing.

Findings: Employees of enterprises show a high sense of the importance of their actions for shaping relationships with business partners. This is based on: communication, building a good image, meeting the needs and expectations of external entities and joint activities for the local community**.**

Research limitations/implications: Future research may include a detailed characterization of the relationships between business entities representing various sectors of the economy.

Practical implications: The surveyed enterprises should shape the internal communication processes of the management staff with employees to build relationships with the environment, improve the external information systems of their partners. Managing the social potential in an enterprise should focus on motivating employees to take actions for shaping relationships with business partners, etc. Moving to a higher level of intra-organizational perception may affect the awareness of the role of the company/organization's employees and their verifying power of activities for the environment.

Social implications: The research results should show employees that their attitudes and openness to social needs can affect solving local problems and building the company's image.

Originality/value: Indicating the perception of the importance of employees in shaping relationships with the environment and evaluation of company's activities in this regard.

Keywords: relationship marketing, enterprise, environment, employees.

Paper category: research paper.

1. Introduction

Relationship marketing is a response to the growing demand for improving the competitiveness of companies on the market. Enterprises interact constantly with their business partners. Both suppliers, recipients are important as well as other business entities with whom enterprises cooperate, as well as customers purchasing products offered on the market or various types of services. It is worth learning the opinions of enterprise employees on the conditions that shape these relationships. This can be a valuable source of information about how the company perceives its position, how to strengthen it in the study of relationships with the environment. Thanks to this approach, the company realizing its development vision will achieve measurable benefits.

The purpose of the study is to answer the following questions: how company employees assess care for building proper relationships with suppliers, recipients, customers and other entities with which the company/organization cooperates, what activities contribute to building good relationships. The article presents various approaches and models of relationship marketing. The development of the concept for relationship marketing was described with reference to particular representatives.

The study was prepared based on the results of empirical research conducted in the period from June to October 2016 on a group of 300 respondents working in various enterprises and organizations in the Lubuskie voivodship.

2. Relationship marketing – the essence, models, importance in practice

There are many references to the concept of relationship marketing in the literature of the subject.

As early as 1966, L. Adler observed that relationships between independent enterprises are "symbiotic" and include both the resources at their disposal and cooperation programs aimed at increasing the market potential of each business partner. The spectrum of using various solutions in the field of symbiotic marketing relationships is to become an antidote to market volatility, meet the needs of customers, contribute to overcoming resource scarcity, be "a weapon in the fight against competition", including an international dimension (Varadarajan, and Rajaratnam, 1986).

Relationship marketing has emerged from two trends of marketing orientation, i.e. industrial and service orientation. Industrial orientation is related to the views and theories of such trends as (Kowalska-Musiał, 2007):

1. American School Harvard Business School (represented by Th. Levitt, B.B. Jackson),
2. The International Marketing and Purchasing (MP) Group (represented by H. Hakansson, I.J. Snehota, N. Cambell, D. Ford, B. Axellon, G. Easton, M.T. Cunnigham, P. Turnbull),
3. Ango-Australian School of Affiliate Marketing (represented by A. Payne, D. Ballantyne, M. Christopher),
4. Centre for Relationship Marketing (represented by J.N. Sheet, A. Parvatiyar).

Service orientation is represented by two trends (Kowalska-Musiał, 2007):

1. Nordic School of Service Marketing (representatives: Ch. Grönroos, E. Gummesson, K. Strandvik, V. Liljander, J.R. Lehtinen),
2. Texas University (representatives: L.L. Berry, T.W. Thompson).

The term relationship marketing was first developed by L. Berry (1983), it concerned a new area in the field of service marketing. According to L. Berry, "Relationship marketing means creating, maintaining and enriching customer relationships. Acquiring a new customer is only the first step in the marketing process" (Otto, 2001, p. 46).

L.L. Berry (1995) characterizes three levels of relationship marketing:

1. The first is focused on ensuring customer loyalty.
2. The second relies heavily on social bonds.
3. The third covers the area of structural solutions of problems important for the client, which is part of the design of activities in the service provision system. By offering customers value-added benefits, the foundation is created to maintain and improve relationships. This happens when the solutions used are not easily copied by other market participants.

Moreover, L.L. Berry (1995) indicates that it is important to provide two-way communication channels at the enterprise – customer level and vice versa customer – enterprise. By providing services, an enterprise can increase market share by: attracting new customers, making more transactions with existing customers, and reducing customer losses. The perspective of looking at relationships applies not only to customers, but also to employees and partners of strategic alliances. By implementing practical solutions in the field of relationship marketing, the company focuses on profitable relationships. Trust is the central element that builds relationships.

A representative of the Nordic School of Marketing of Services, Ch. Grönroos, gives the following definition: "Relationship marketing is shaping, maintaining and enriching relationships with customers and other partners in such a way that the goals of both parties are achieved through mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises made". The role of bonds and mutual achievement of goals are important (Otto, 2001, after Grönroos, 1990, p. 138).

Another representative of this trend, E. Gummesson, also made a significant contribution to the development of relationship marketing. In his approach, he extracts 30 various relationships that can be observed in the sphere of business and in its environment. Relationship

marketing is perceived by him as a variety of relationships, networks and interactions that affect the functioning of many business entities. He emphasizes that the process of interaction between suppliers, customers, competitors and other entities contributes to the co-creation of value by interested parties. He indicates that the responsibility for cooperation rests with all parties – participants of the relationship, showing activity not only in the short term but also in the long term. His concept has an operational character and is based on practical aspects of relationships. Thanks to grouping them into market and non-market relationships, it is possible to see the multifaceted concept that describes the closer and further conditions of business in a network of multiple connections. Activities undertaken in the area of relationship marketing are part of marketing management, aspects specific to service marketing or the approach visible in industrial marketing can be found in them. Not without significance are issues covering the sphere of quality management (Gummesson, 1997).

The six market model is the best known concept of relationship marketing. It presents considerations for six related broadened areas of enterprise marketing activities. Relationships with many parties are shown – organizations or enterprises and other entities that can potentially contribute, directly or indirectly, to the market efficiency of the enterprise. Six market domains were identified in the model, with centrally located "internal markets". Moreover, it has the following markets (Payne et al., 1999):

- customers,
- suppliers,
- potential employees of the enterprise,
- influential institutions,
- mediators (distributors).

The configuration presented in the model emphasizes the role of internal marketing as an integrator and facilitator, supporting the management of relationships with other entities in other "markets". When modifying the model, its creators adopt an approach that assumes the central location of customer markets. Relationship marketing activities directed at clients are necessary, but they are an insufficient area of impact on the environment. The organization must also identify other relevant market domains in which to distinguish subdomains that need to be grouped. It is necessary to develop appropriate marketing strategies for them. Relationship marketing meets constant changes in the business environment. There are close links and complementary mechanisms of interaction between new organizational structures and relationship marketing. It can be understood as "a market-driven, customer-oriented, overall management concept, partly based on a return to the roots of marketing and the original marketing concept" (Payne et al., 1999, p. 28). It is important to provide the customer with the best value offer possible. The goal of relationship marketing is to create value for the client, care for his/her satisfaction and loyalty, which helps to improve profitability in the long run. In addition, it is worth emphasizing that this approach is based on creating a win –

win relationship, providing benefits to interested parties, this is particularly evident in the supply chain (Payne et al., 1999).

Close cooperation with long-term suppliers meets the requirements posed by the need for continuous improvement of competitiveness. Intermediaries as well as existing clients have a significant impact on the profitability and turnover of the company. Improving relationships with mediators and special marketing programs supported by specific financial resources should bring the expected results. The potential employees of the company are also important, the acquisition of which requires the development of effective and attractive offers. Activities undertaken in these markets require the use of public relationships' techniques or sponsorship. The specificity of influential institutions is strictly dependent on the industry, sector and business profile of the company. Internal markets are employees in a particular enterprise whose needs and expectations should be taken into account and constantly met (Payne et al., 1999).

K. Fonfara states that "The concept of relationship marketing puts emphasis on the management process, i.e. creating, developing and maintaining relationships of the company with other entities. It exposes the direct, interactive, two-sided and multilateral nature of contacts between the seller and the buyer and other entities in the process of creating and supplying products and services. In addition, it emphasizes the lasting nature of the links between exchange partners. Creating and maintaining these relationships requires time, effort and money" (Fonfara, 2004, p. 61).

According to another definition of I.H. Gordon, "Relationship marketing is a continuous process of seeking and creating new value with an individual client and sharing benefits within a partnership, covering the entire period of the client's purchasing activity" (Gordon. 2001, p. 35). He emphasizes that cooperation between suppliers and a selected group of customers is permanent.

An efficient organization of the 21st century should look in the future and learn from experiences not only their own but also other participants in the environment. When creating relationships with external partners, it is crucial to keep in mind the needs of the client, which is not only an external client but also an internal one – an employee of the company. This requires commitment especially from managers so as to form a new kind of relationship between participants of the organization and the environment (Mazurkiewicz, 2010).

Building long-term relationships with customers contributes to strengthening their loyalty, and as a consequence stabilizes the conditions of functioning and the level of goodwill. Moreover, customers are involved in the process of identifying, creating and delivering value, providing the company with access to information about their preferences, problems and experiences. An important role in these activities is played by the company's personnel who can effectively listen and identify the needs of customers. They do not feel the need to constantly compare the supplier's offer with other competitive offers (Dobiegała-Korona, 2008).

The implementation of corporate social responsibility (CRS) solutions in practice may contribute to the co-creation of value by the customer in terms of products and services offered on the market (Luu, 2019; Iglesias et al., 2020).

It is also advisable to note the research that provides deeper insight into the role different types of customer commitment play in relation to important relationship marketing outcomes. A comprehensive and integrated approach to understanding customer commitment supports establishing and maintaining co-creative and interactive customer-enterprise relationships. This affects the quality of the company's product or service offering and customer retention. Enterprises should find ways to support specific types of customer commitment in line with their strategic goal and seek customers as proactive collaborators (Braun, Hadwich, and Bruhn, 2017).

Because customers migrate through different relationship states over time, not all relationship marketing strategies are equally effective. In order to meet the needs of entrepreneurs, it is worth looking at the results of the research by J.Z. Zhang, G.F. Watson IV, R.W. Palmatier and P. Dant, who used the multidimensional Markov model to analyse a set of data on well-known companies. They identified different relationship states, customer migration between these relationship states, but also migration mechanisms. Knowledge of the most effective RM strategies in all migration paths is very valuable for companies. Managers in an enterprise can find guidance on how to allocate resources in an efficient and dynamic manner (Zhang et al., 2016).

Caring for customer satisfaction is a must for the company, otherwise dissatisfied customers go to the competition or change the brand. A company losing contact with a customer cannot remove any irregularities (Mazurek-Łopacińska, 2002). Y. Minta and Y. Traore (2018) presented in their publication a list of relationship marketing variables that affect customer loyalty based on literature research. They include such factors as, among others: trust, commitment, satisfaction, personalization, perceived quality, values, communication.

The conceptual model of customer loyalty research may cover the following areas of relationship quality, these are: trust, satisfaction, commitment. The following tactics in the field of relationship marketing are assigned to them: service quality, brand image, price perception and value offers (Eskandari et al., 2017). It is worth adding that customer loyalty is influenced not only by their level of satisfaction with the service or product offered by a particular company, but also by how they perceive the relationships that have developed as a result of long-term cooperation with a particular employee (Olszyńska, 2005).

Relationship marketing requires that shared value systems of partners should be compatible or at least close to each other, as this supports achieving common goals, as each entity identifies with them (Baruk, 2008). One should agree with the statement that: "In the process of partnership cooperation, over time, they form extensive social, economic and technical bonds. Partner relationships are therefore a complicated management, marketing, logistics, social and cultural problem" (Światowiec, 2006, p. 15).

It is worth asking the question here why is the interest in relationship marketing in all its forms growing? Ballantyne D., Christopherm M., Payne A. (2003) provide a reply. The first fundamental reason is the openness of the market and the dynamics of changes occurring in it as well as intra-organizational changes. Establishing greater openness with suppliers, key clients and other stakeholders restores the strategic stability of the company and also gives new opportunities for creating value. The second reason is better and faster exchange as well as data collection (unprecedented on such a scale) on customer behaviour. Furthermore, the increase in uncertainty on financial markets and the resulting risk of loss of value for shareholders (Ballantyne, Christopherm, Payne, 2003) was also important. "Increased uncertainty in the environment supports shaping relationships based on recurring transactions and relationships in which the dominant role is played by a partner ensuring easier access to rare resources. The uncertainty of the environment may also cause the development of a bilateral relationship in which the mutual dependence between the partners is evened out" (Żebrucki, 2012, p. 18).

Relationship marketing should be combined with other approaches. A good example of synthesis is the look of A. Payne and P. Frow (2013), who compare relationship marketing and customer relationship management (CRM). They indicate that a holistic approach to customer relationship management and other key stakeholders leads to an increase in shareholder value. The joint research areas they propose should be referred to the strategic management process. Relationship marketing and CRM is gaining importance in the practical sphere of enterprise functioning. The authors of the concept point to the important role currently observed on the market of activities in the field of building relationships using information technologies, including in particular social media and the possibilities offered by mobile devices and the so-called Internet 3.0 network.

Using the Institutional Role Model (IRM), C. Grabellus, L.L. Heinrich and W.H. Schulz (2019) presented a conceptual approach showing the basic framework for effective stakeholder cooperation in the B2B market. It is based on the use of the B2B retail platform taking into account various aspects of identifying the role perception by the partner in the area of interconnection with the support of the 360° assessment, which is based on self-assessment, partner assessment, and expert assessment. The cooperation of stakeholders using digital technologies enables the optimization of processes and gaining a competitive advantage. The cooperative B2B platform can be adapted to the changing environment of the enterprise and ensure ease of integration of new entities.

An important element of the new challenges facing relationship marketing is the multifaceted research combining achievements in the field of relationship marketing (RM), customer relationship management (CRM) in the form of many-to-many marketing – their extension and logic SD (service-dominant logic) and service science. In this way, the connection between the Business to Business (B2B), Business to Customer (B2C),

and the Consumer-Consumer (C2C) approach is established. Such approaches indicate the active role of clients in the network of mutual interactions (Polese, and Gummesson, 2009).

In order to meet the challenges of the revolution in technology, Internet-of-Things (IoT) is becoming a new area for entrepreneurs to develop to improve customer experience, and it may also contribute to greater effectiveness of relationship marketing strategies. Thanks to the connection and exchange of data via the Internet, information of a strategic nature is collected, and enterprises increase their effectiveness in responding to market changes. Benefits are achieved in terms of improved efficiency and business results. Moreover, enterprises remain competitive. It is also essential for creating new creative solutions for existing business models. An integrated, modern communication platform requires a high level of confidence in the use of data by economic operators. The impact of IoT on relationship marketing is based on the ability not only to create new solutions, but also to optimize communication with customers (Fang-Yi Lo, and Campos, 2018).

The online commerce market is a suitable environment for relationship marketing. Consumer satisfaction is related to the perception of quality which has four dimensions, i.e. the quality of information, services, products and deliveries. Satisfaction causes customer loyalty and turns into a long-term relationship (Radionova, and Praude, 2016).

Due to the specificity of relationship marketing, it is an important research area not only for the discipline of management and quality science, but also may be of interest to others, for example, sociological sciences and psychology. One such example is the transfer of the Convoy Model Theory to relationship marketing. This applies to referring to the advanced experience and expertise of the company's employees in order to shape a support group for clients according to their needs and expectations. It is possible to create a support network in the chain of business connections of enterprises. It is important to define the areas of responsibility of market participants and the durability of customer relationships (Saath et al. 2018). While analysing the issues related to supply chains, it is worth paying attention to aspects related to the behavioural sphere, relating to behaviour based on power between business partners, i.e. to the manifestations of behaviour proving domination, egalitarianism or submission. In the publication of I. Gölgecia, W.H. Murphyb, D.A. Johnston (2018), conceptualization and presentation of the behavioural characteristics of the partners were conducted. The possibilities of using the presented approach to better study the dynamics of force in relations were discussed.

Based on the theory of social exchange, an attempt was made to combine aspects of relationship marketing with this theory in order to explain long-term relationships between competing companies, which may include, for example, networks or strategic alliances. The proposed conceptual model shows the factors influencing the behaviour of enterprises involved in inter-organizational relations (Neumann, and Laimer, 2019). This may be a certain area of reference for examining the aspects of competitive advantage between these types of entities.

Another area where relationship marketing finds its practical reference is cooperation between importing and exporting companies. An important issue is the perception of the value of the relationship between partners. Business entities are relationship-oriented, in which sharing knowledge and experience, combining unique competences is visible. Moreover, the required complementary capabilities and the reference to the basic principles of flexibility, solidarity and reciprocity are essential. Creating higher value relationships support competition in the global market. Relations are built by, among others, exchange of knowledge about products and the market between international partners, they are influenced by the complex relationship between mental distance and the culture of sensitivity represented by partners (Skarmeas, Zeriti, and Baltas, 2016).

Relationship marketing finds its reference to research in the field of business leadership. The research was carried out on the factors most important for relationship marketing in the context of leadership creation, referring to various stages of business relationships, including the possibility of practical applications of the proposed solutions for managers of various levels in enterprises, which may support the business improvement strategy (Jraisat, 2017).

Some companies may consider implementing social media marketing, following the example of the well-known Maersk company, building communities among professionals, employees and current or potential customers, improving their image in the environment, e.g. by showing their social commitment (Zaif, and Cerchia, 2019). By implementing activities in the field of SMM (Social Media Marketing), business entities have a greater chance of acquiring new employees, receiving feedback not only from current but also former employees, it also gives an additional perspective for re-evaluating the HR policy. In addition to building relationships with customers, there is also a platform for improvements in personnel management.

Ch. Grönroos (2017) indicates that human resource management should be more oriented outside the organization and the need to focus employees on the customer in terms of company-customer relationships. Internal marketing should be focused on the client and broadly understood services. Without successful internal marketing, an organization will not develop a service culture. Active customer-oriented leadership, enhanced by internal marketing processes and service culture, should be considered a leading value and norm in the organization. Employees in the company are an important "link" between the organization and the customer.

3. Presentation of research results. Indications for enterprises

The study uses empirical research conducted on a group of 300 people employed in the Lubuskie voivodship. They constitute a fragment of research carried out in relation to broader, more complex issues in the field of enterprise management. The research was carried out with the help of a tool which is a questionnaire. The survey contained questions constituting the basis for presenting the characteristics of the studied population. The following elements of the respondents description were distinguished: gender, age, length of service in the enterprise/organization. The characteristics of the studied population are presented in Table 1. Moreover, the respondents answered the questions that constitute the basis for the presentation of basic data characterizing the enterprises/organizations, in which the respondents are employed. It is shown in Table 2.

Table 1.
Characteristics of the studied population

Specification		In percentage terms (in%)
Gender of respondents	women	56,7
	men	43,3
Age structure of respondents	Up to 20 years old	2,3
	From 21 to 30 years old	57,0
	From 31 to 40 years old	20,4
	From 41 to 50 years old	13,0
	From 51 to 60 years old	7,3
Work experience in an enterprise/organization	Shorter than 1 year	21,7
	From 1 to 5 years	44,0
	From 6 to 10 years	16,0
	From 11 to 15 years	6,3
	From 16 to 20 years	5,7
	More than 20 years	6,3

Source: own study based on conducted research.

Among the respondents there were 56,7% women and 43,3% men. The largest group (57,0% of respondents) were people aged 21 to 30 years. Then 20,4% were respondents who were in the age group of 31 to 40 years old, 13,0% of the respondents were people aged 41 to 50 years and 7,3% were employees aged 51 to 60 years. 2,3% of respondents are people up to 20 years old.

Taking into account work experience in the enterprise/organization, employees from 1 to 5 years dominated (44,0% of respondents), 21,7% of the surveyed population are employees with seniority up to 1 year, 16,0% are people working in a particular enterprise/organization from 6 to 10 years. Employees with experience from 11 to 15 years and over 20 years constituted a group of 6,3% of respondents. The least numerous group were people with a period of employment from 16 to 20 years. They constituted 5,7% of respondents.

Table 2.
Characteristics of enterprises/organizations in which the surveyed respondents are employed

Specification		In percentage terms (in %)
Period of operation of the enterprise/organization on the market	Up to 5 years	14,3
	From 6 to 10 years	16,3
	From 11 to 15 years	17,0
	From 16 to 20 years	9,0
	More than 20 years	43,4
The geographical scope of the enterprise/organization	Local market	28,0
	Regional market	19,7
	Domestic market	36,7
	International market	42,7
Type of enterprise/organization's activity	production	33,0
	trade	24,6
	services	39,7
	other	11,7
Legal form	State enterprise	27,7
	Private enterprise	65,7
	Another form	6,6
Capital ownership	Polish capital	57,7
	Foreign capital	20,7
	Mixed capital with foreign advantage	17,0
	Mixed capital with Polish advantage	4,6
Size of enterprise/organization	Micro (less than 10 employees)	14,7
	Small (from 10 to 49 employees)	25,0
	Medium (from 50 to 249 employees)	27,7
	Large (more than 249 employees)	32,6

Source: own study based on conducted research.

The surveyed employees were employed in economic entities whose period of functioning on the market was varied. The most numerous group were those that existed for over 20 years. The least numerous group was entities with 16 to 20 years of experience. The geographical range was varied, some entities were active not only on one market. Most of the surveyed entities are private enterprises (65,7%). In terms of capital ownership, Polish capital dominated. Most people (32,6% of respondents) work in large entities.

The respondents commented on whether the management and other employees of the company/organization care about building proper relationships with suppliers. This is shown in Figure 1.
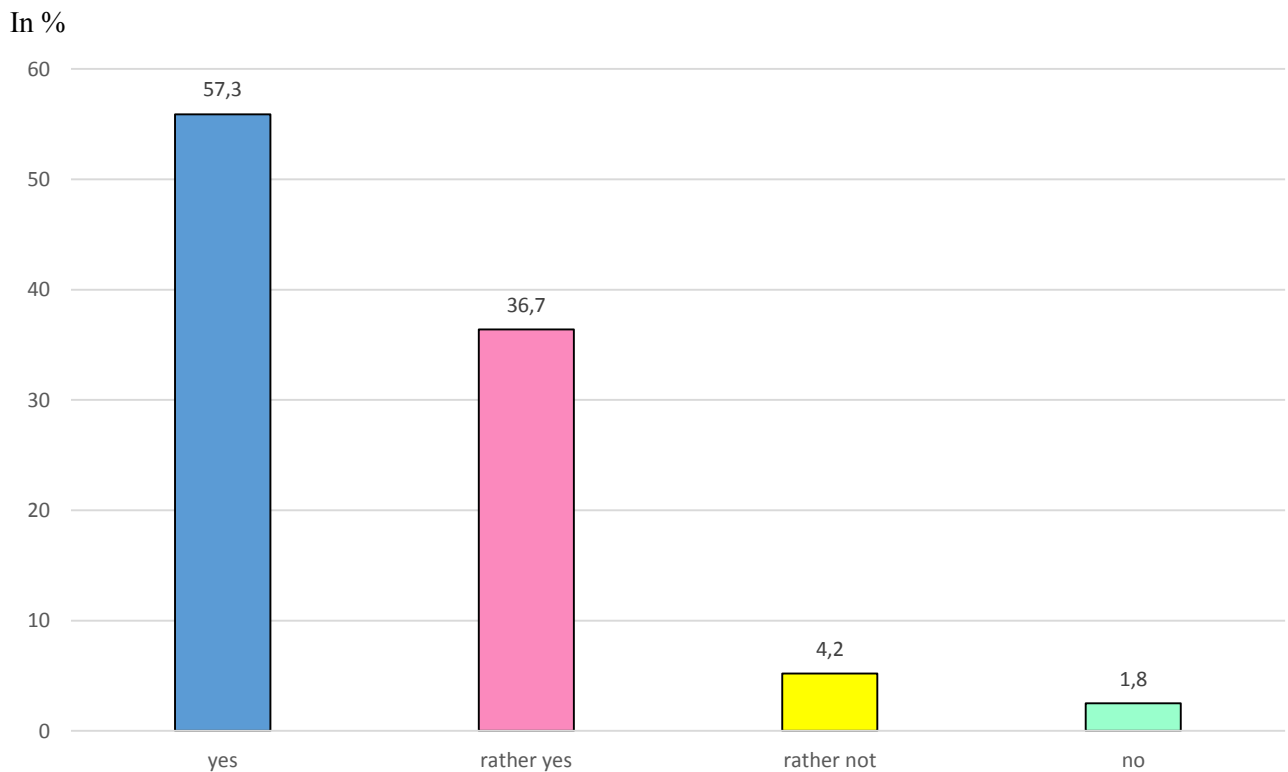
In %
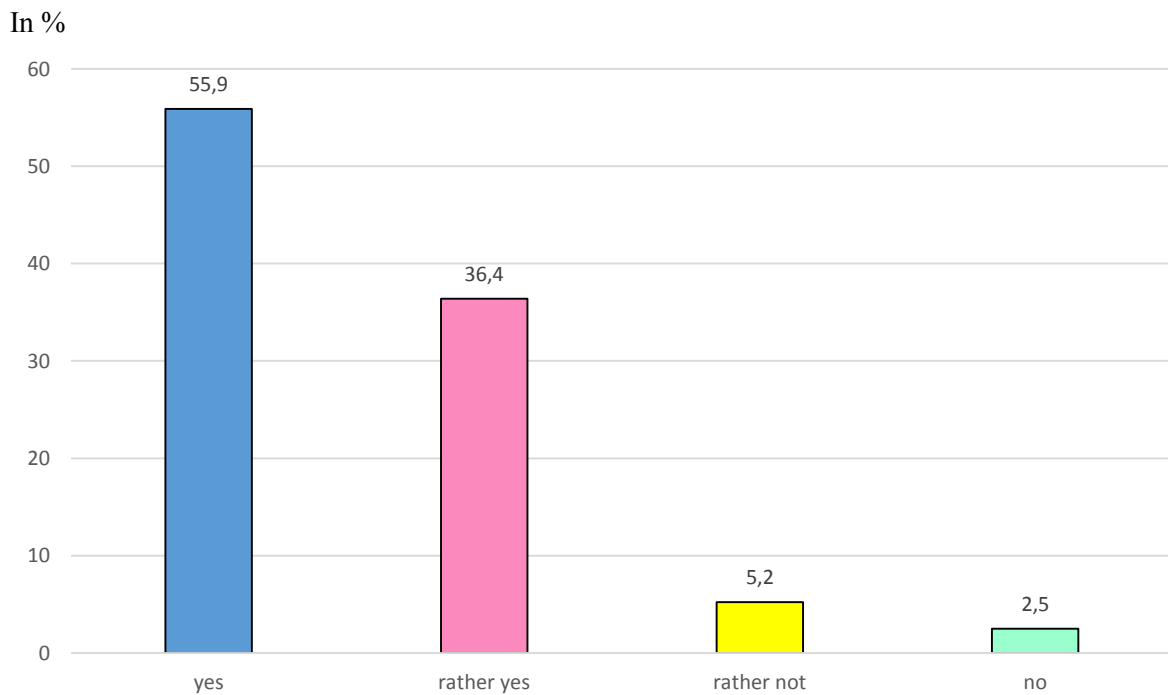
Note: 95,3% of respondents commented on building relationships with suppliers.

Figure 1. Respondents' opinion on care for the management and other employees of the enterprise/organization to develop appropriate relationships with suppliers. Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

Among the respondents who defined how they perceive the relationship between the management and other employees of the company/organization with suppliers, 55,9% believe that employees care about these relationships because they indicated yes. 36,4% of respondents in the particular group gave the answer rather yes, 5,2% rather not and 2,5% no. The data provided shows that the vast majority of respondents are of the opinion that measures are being taken that support shaping proper relationships with suppliers.

The respondents also specified whether the management and other employees of the company/organization care about building proper relationships with recipients. This is shown in Figure 2.
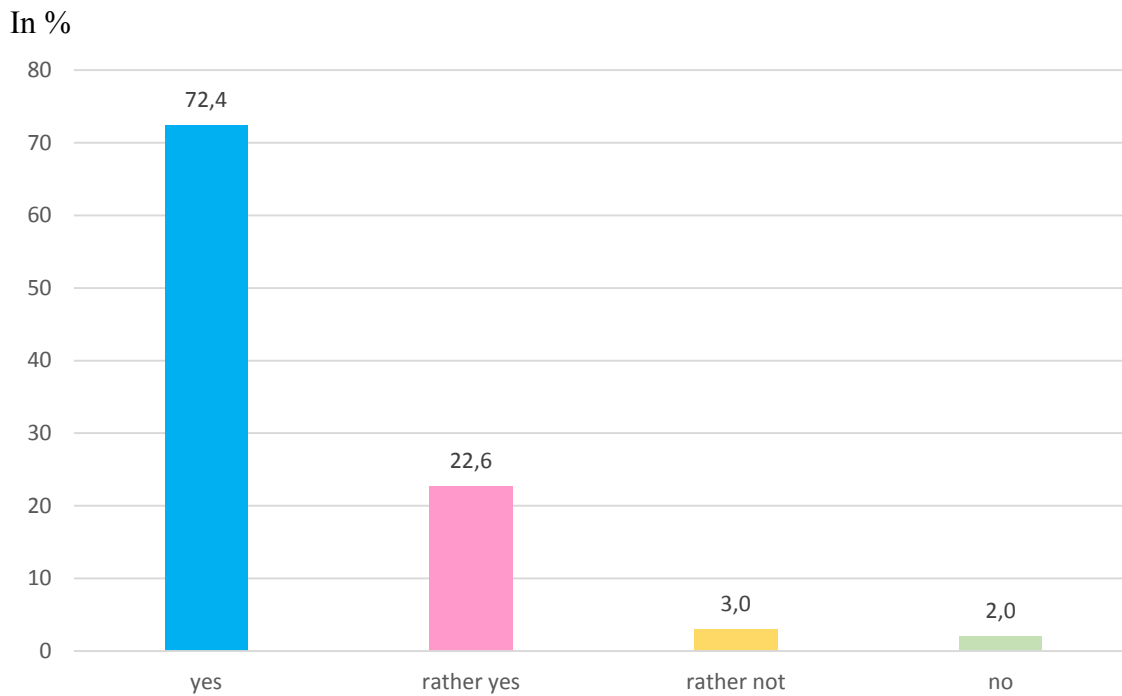
In %

Note: 95,3% of respondents commented on building relationships with recipients.

Figure 2. Respondents' opinion on the care taken by the management staff and other employees of the enterprise/organization for appropriate relationships with recipients. Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

Among the respondents who defined how they perceive the relationship between the management and other employees of the company/organization with suppliers, 57,3% believe that employees care for these relationships because they indicated yes for the answer. 36,7% of respondents from the particular group gave the answer rather yes, 4,2% rather not and 1,8% no. The data provided shows that the vast majority of respondents are of the opinion that measures are being taken that support shaping proper relationships with suppliers.

The respondents commented on whether the management and other employees of the company/organization care about building proper relationships with clients. This is shown in Figure 3.
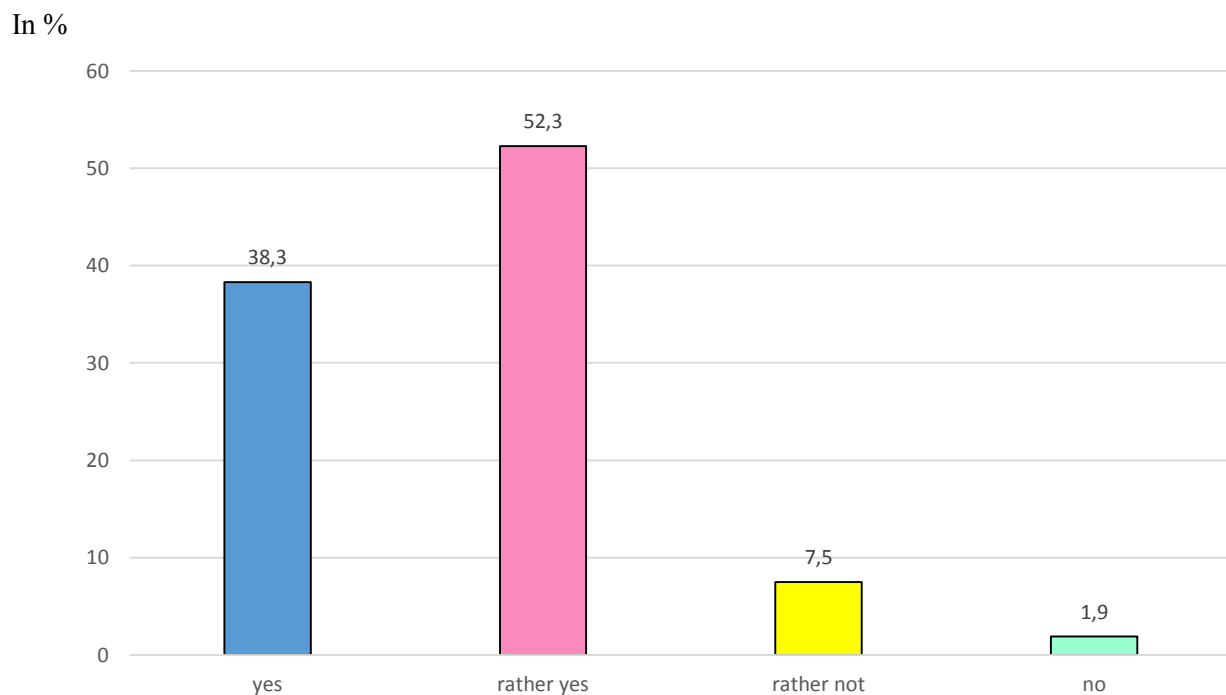
In %

Note: 99,0% of respondents commented on building customer relationships.

Figure 3. Respondents' opinion on the care taken by the management staff and other employees of the enterprise/organization for appropriate customer relationships. Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

Among the respondents who defined how they perceive the relationship between the management and other employees of the enterprise/organization with clients, 72,4% believe that employees care about these relationships because they indicated yes. 22,6% of respondents from the particular group gave the answer rather yes, 3,0% rather no and 2,0 no. The vast majority of respondents are of the opinion that actions are taken to shape the right relationships with customers.

The respondents also specified whether the management and other employees of the enterprise/organization care about building proper relationships with other enterprises/ organizations/institutions with which the enterprise cooperates. This is shown in Figure 4.
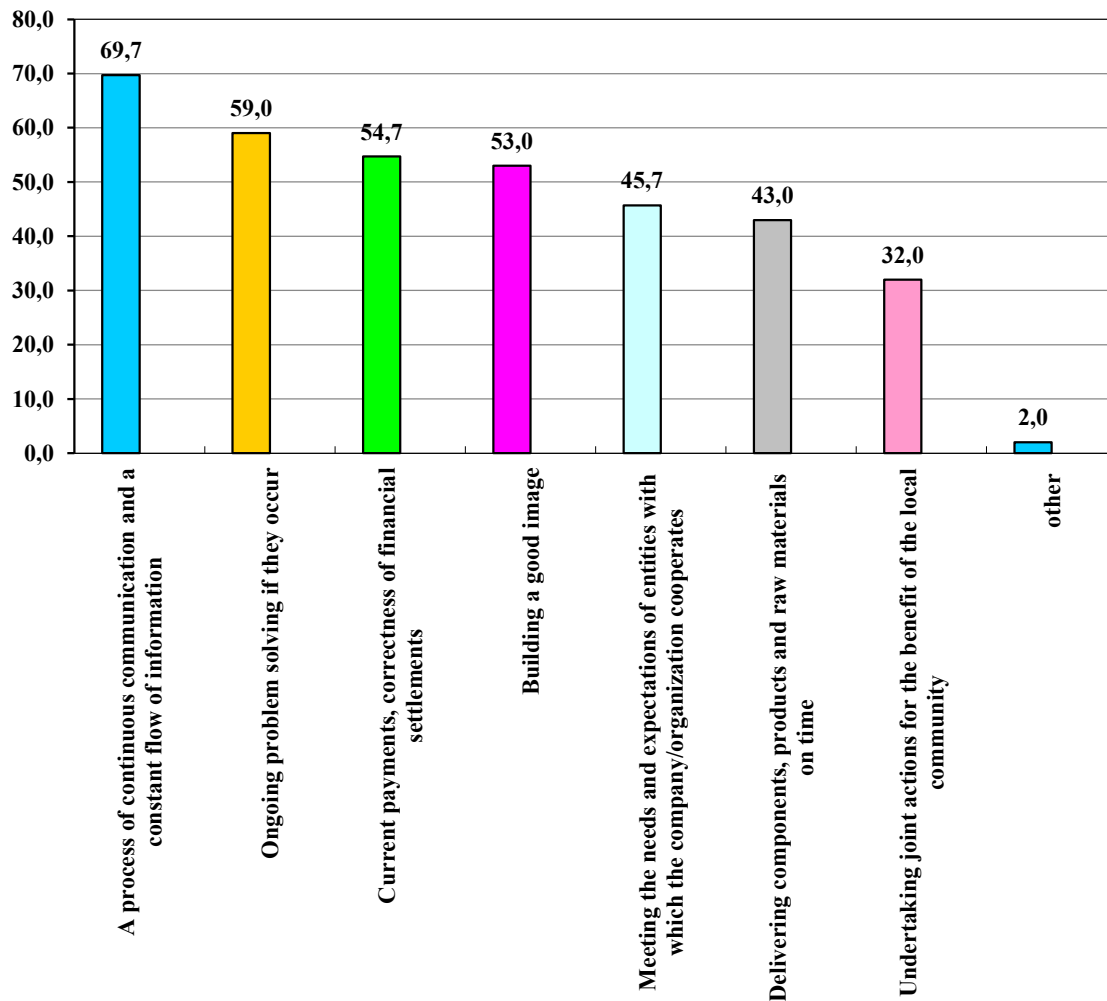
In %

Note: 88,6% of respondents commented on building relationships with these external stakeholders.

Figure 4. Respondents' opinion on the care taken by the management and other employees of the enterprise/organization for appropriate relationships with other enterprises/organizations/institutions with which the enterprise cooperates. Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

Among respondents who defined how they perceive the relationship between the management and other employees of the enterprise/organization with other enterprises/organizations/institutions with which the particular entity cooperates 38,3% believe that employees care about these relationships because they indicated the answer yes. 52,3% of respondents from the particular group gave the answer rather yes, 7,5% rather not and 1,9% no.

The respondents commented on what type of actions taken by the employees of the enterprise/organization supports building proper relations with: suppliers, recipients, customers and other enterprises/organizations/institutions with which the enterprise cooperates. This is shown in Figure 5.

In %

Bar chart values:
- A process of continuous communication and a constant flow of information: 69,7
- Ongoing problem solving if they occur: 59,0
- Current payments, correctness of financial settlements: 54,7
- Building a good image: 53,0
- Meeting the needs and expectations of entities with which the company/organization cooperates: 45,7
- Delivering components, products and raw materials on time: 43,0
- Undertaking joint actions for the benefit of the local community: 32,0
- other: 2,0

Figure 5. Actions taken by employees of the enterprise/organization to build proper relationships with: suppliers, recipients, customers and other enterprises/organizations/institutions with which the enterprise cooperates. Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

Based on the analysis of the conducted research, it can be concluded that the vast majority of respondents attach great importance to the process of communicating with business partners. Nearly 70,0% of respondents share this view. It is also closely related to the second factor, i.e. ongoing solving of emerging problems, which, as known, cannot take place without maintaining permanent "communication ties" with partners from the environment with which the particular entity cooperates. Financial issues connected with current payment regulation are also significant. The next two factors are related to each other, as building a good image requires, among others, meeting the needs and expectations of entities with which the company/organization cooperates. Further positions include: delivering sub-assemblies, products, raw materials on time (as indicated by 43,0% of respondents) and undertaking joint activities with local business partners (32,0% of respondents). 2% of respondents indicated other activities, including the impact of prices and charity activities.

Research shows that an important factor affecting building of good relationships with business partners is building a good image. As A.I. Baruk states, employees are a key carrier of the company's image. Therefore, shaping the right professional attitudes of employees characterizes entities operating in accordance with the principles of relationship marketing (p. 43).

Due to the fact that respondents first pointed to the factor related to communication, which was defined as "a process of continuous communication and constant flow of information", it is worth considering what supports such activities. W. Rydzak (2017) referring to the results of the European Communication Monitor (ECM) research "indicates that currently there is a perception of coexistence and complementarity of online and traditional channels. The challenge for companies in the next few years will be such a dialogue that, despite multi-channel communication and various environment groups, ensures consistency of messages addressed to stakeholders".

The fulfilment of the first postulate regarding the communication of business partners with each other is closely related to the implementation of the second important aspect of business implementation in this dimension, namely solving problems on a regular basis if they only appear. They may be of a different nature and result in irregularities on many levels of enterprise's operation. Sometimes the chain of interdependencies drives the "spiral" of subsequent gaps and deficiencies, resulting from the fact that the "weaker link", e.g. in the logistics chain, like the domino effect, escalates worrying problems. It is therefore necessary to constantly diagnose the situation and be proactive rather than conservative. Enterprises that want to ensure long-term relationships with other market players as well as with consumers should meet their needs and expectations. Implementing various CRM (*Consumer Relationship Management*) activities can be the answer. CRM solutions should be prepared and used in an enterprise to provide support for all phases of customer contact with the enterprise. Interactive (communication) CRM can be particularly important, which uses the latest Internet and telephone technology that ensures a smooth flow of information. The scope of its application most often includes the marketing, sales and service department in enterprises (Malanowska, and Koliński, 2011). Benefits that can be achieved thanks to the implementation of the CRM system are such as (Ławnicki, 2005):

1. increasing customer loyalty by monitoring contacts on the enterprise – customer line,
2. fast consumer information flow,
3. improvement of complaint procedures,
4. creating one, coherent database of potential and actual clients.

Inbound marketing – the concept of conducting business-market communication, which aims not only at building but also maintaining and strengthening long-term relationships on the level of customer and business interaction, goes against the challenges of the modern market. The solutions used in this area within marketing automation, SEO, integration of ERP and CRM systems allow building long-term, profitable relationships of the company on the market.

Thanks to this, it is possible to generate a wide spectrum of benefits for clients, the basis for the stability of relationships is being built (Witczak, 2014).

The ability to create customer satisfaction is associated with the use of customer service logistics. It is determined by factors such as time, reliability, communication and convenience (Ławnicki, 2005). Communication helps maintain close contact with customers but also monitors service reliability.

The efficient communication process of business partners operating in a complex network of relationships and entities that participate in the supply chain can promote the exchange of knowledge. However, it is important to remember that there may be various types of barriers. They should be accurately identified in the process of sharing knowledge at the level of various actors in the supply chain (Dohn, 2016). Co-creation of new knowledge with relevant stakeholders requires an efficient flow of information, its generation and continuous research to update it.

Conclusions

The paper shows how employees of enterprises ("internal customers") perceive building the right relationships with: suppliers, recipients, customers and other enterprises, organizations and institutions with which a particular entity cooperates. As a result of the conducted research, it was found that the discussed group of respondents perceived a high level of implementation of such activities. Employees show a high awareness of the impact of their actions on the relationship that a particular entity forms with the environment. It has been proven that the main factors favouring this include: the process of continuous communication and constant flow of information, ongoing problem solving, correct and timely implementation of financial settlements as well as building a good image. The following ones were considered a bit less important: providing components, products, raw materials on time, meeting the needs and expectations of entities with which the company cooperates or undertaking joint actions for the local community. Important indications in the field of practice include: continuous improvement of the process of communicating with the environment, also in the dimension of following innovations in the field of applying new, interactive technologies. It is also important to proactively react to signals coming from the environment, and to quickly solve emerging problems. Image building may be fostered by practices in the field of corporate social responsibility, e.g. implementing projects for the local community together with other market participants. It would be worthwhile to make efforts to generate "quick warning" diagnostic programs that would help business partners manage also in crisis conditions.

One should agree with the statement that: "Mutual, diverse relations perfectly fit into the partial paradigm of a modern enterprise – the paradigm of relational competence. Enterprises, by establishing relationships, strive to achieve goals that they cannot achieve individually" (Kwiecień, 2018, p. 19). Creating competitive advantage of enterprises can be rooted in shaping the right relationships with business partners and customers. The behaviour of employees of a particular business entity significantly affects its perception by the environment. It is because of their efficient functioning and perception of the need to build relationships with the business environment that the enterprise will be able to shape its competitive advantage and strengthen its market position. The image of the company is developed on many levels and without the full commitment of employees it cannot be consolidated in the opinion of the environment.

Enterprises will have to unify relationship marketing practices to focus on high-quality customer service, as this will affect the success and retention of the business entity. Recognition of relationship marketing as a "wave of the future" is becoming increasingly important (Rasul, 2018).

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