



Agnieszka Tul-Krzyszczuk^{1✉}, Jerzy Gębski¹, Agnieszka Maciąg¹

¹Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW), Poland

SUPPLIER – BUYER RELATIONSHIPS IN CATERING ENTERPRISES

Abstract. The purpose of this study was to analyze the supplier–buyer relationships in catering enterprises. The research method was based on individual structured interviews conducted with 99 managers of catering companies in 2014–2016. Direct cooperation with suppliers and building long-lasting loyalty were found highly important by the respondents. In recent years, catering companies have strengthened their relationships with existing customers, suppliers, other companies and public institutions, including through the implementation of solutions such as ECR, rapid inventory turnover in the supply chain, TQM, QR, Benchmarking, SCOR and JiT. This has brought considerable effects to operators, including an extended offering, improved flexibility, higher production and service capacity, larger market shares and more prestige. The choice of suppliers is decisive for the quality, timeliness and frequency of deliveries; the ability to establish direct contacts with the supplier; the range of products offered; attractive prices; convenient delivery terms; and extended payment deadlines.

Keywords: relations, partnership, supplier, buyer, catering enterprises, supply management

INTRODUCTION

In a modern economy, enterprises keep looking for solutions that could provide a basis for building a sustainable competitive advantage and would enable market success.

Hence, a significant strategic value for today's companies is the ability to create and manage partner relationships. In a partnership-based cooperation, over time, the supplier and the buyer establish a strong comprehensive relationship of an economic, technical and social nature. The development of such relationships should involve a synergistic use of the partners' strengths (i.e. market

position, skills, resources). Through cooperation, the partners strive to achieve mutual benefits referred to as the relationship value. Their goal is to reduce transaction costs while increasing value, which leads to mutual benefits (Urbaniak, 2018).

The final link in the food supply (catering) chain requires specific handling of market relationship processes due to their direct impact on consumer decisions. This is because the market success of catering enterprises depends on multiple factors, including the terms of cooperation with suppliers and the ability to reach the final customers with the offering. Also, the quality of food products offered to consumers depends on the quality of

✉PhD Agnieszka Tul-Krzyszczuk, Department of Organization and Consumption Economics, Warsaw University of Life Sciences SGGW, Nowoursynowska 159c St., 02-776 Warsaw, Poland, e-mail: agnieszka_tul_krzyszczuk@sggw.pl

supplier relationships (Tul-Krzyszczuk and Krajewski, 2014; Stangierska et al., 2018).

The relations between owners or managers of catering facilities and their suppliers play a special role in running the business. Choosing the right supplier can have a direct effect on financial performance. In addition, greater cooperation with business partners in a dynamic market gives a sense of greater operational safety (Grego-Planer et al., 2013; Petrykowska, 2013; Tul-Krzyszczuk and Krajewski, 2014; Czernski, 2017).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze the relations between catering enterprises and their suppliers, and to attempt to indicate the key determinants of the choice of suppliers in catering establishments.

In the course of the research, the following research hypothesis was put forward: H0: the determinants of supplier selection and the effects of a strengthened partnership with a supplier differ depending on years and scope of business activity and financial condition of a catering company. By implementing innovative concepts of supply management and other solutions, catering companies reap considerable benefits which also deepen their cooperation with suppliers.

This study relies on secondary data based on a critical analysis of relevant literature, and on primary research data retrieved from individual interviews with persons responsible for management processes in catering establishments.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research material consists of data retrieved from individual structured interviews conducted in 2014–2016 with 99 persons responsible for management processes (including supplier cooperation and implementation of innovations in catering enterprises). A purposeful sampling technique was used to select the catering enterprises.

Data was analyzed using the statistical suite SPSS 24 (Imago 4.0). The percentage share of enterprises who implemented and evaluated solutions designed to improve supplier relations was further defined. The study included a statistical analysis based on the chi-square test that shows whether there is a statistically significant difference in the number of companies improving the supply process and in assessing determinants of building relationships with suppliers between catering premises, also due to the period of operation on the market,

the period of basic activity and financial condition. The strength of the relationship was assessed based on the Cramer's V contingency coefficient.

Catering enterprises were mostly run by natural persons (35%) or operated as limited liability companies (25%) and partnerships (13%). In addition, young companies with up to 5 years of market experience were the largest group (45%), followed by those with over 15 years (21%), 10–15 years (19%) and 5–9 years (15%) of experience. These enterprises were mainly active in the local market (67%), international market (13%) or domestic (12%) and regional (8%) markets. The vast majority of the catering companies surveyed were active in the Mazowieckie voivodeship (ca. 75%). Two companies were based in each of the Kujawsko–Pomorskie and Łódzkie voivodeships; and one company was based in each of the Dolnośląskie, Lubelskie, Opolskie, Śląskie, Świętokrzyskie and Wielkopolskie voivodeships.

BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS

In recent years, the development of the relational approach was driven by a number of phenomena, including: problems with maintaining the marketing loyalty of existing customers; growing operating costs and new clients; rapid development of information technologies, making more information on alternative products, suppliers or solutions available to clients; a significantly greater competition in many markets; or large fluctuation among sales specialists (Machel, 2010; Ciurla and Nowak, 2011).

Creating and maintaining such relationships plays a decisive role in running a business. Of the ten to twenty dimensions of business relations, the following are considered key from the marketing perspective: cooperation, commitment, trust, interdependence, common values, opportunism, communication, conflict, strength, benefits of relationships and effects of relationships (Leszczyński and Pilarczyk, 2012).

Building a partnership with the supplier allows the buyer to achieve a number of benefits, such as time saving, increase in turnover, reduction of risk related to the selection of a new supplier or purchase of a new product (service), improvements to the communication process, solving common (e.g. technical, organizational) problems and, finally, a more efficient use of resources, improvements to production processes or service delivery, and providing a better and more satisfying customer

service. Partnerships allow to quickly diagnose and respond to changing customer needs and expectations, which also translates into maintaining or improving the competitive edge in the market (Jones et al., 2003; Grego-Planer et al., 2013; Petrykowska, 2013; Tul-Krzyszczuk and Krajewski, 2014; Czernski, 2017).

Moreover, close contacts between suppliers and buyers contribute to the emergence of many (product or organizational) innovations and accelerate their implementation by involving the buyer in new product development. This allows the buyer to satisfy its own individual needs and flexibly respond to consumer needs (Mohr and Spekman, 1994; Sheth, 1996). These benefits drive the further development of cooperation and open communication while also strengthening trust and relationships between partners. This is how the partners get to know each other better and learn or sometimes interpret each other's organizational cultures (Spiteri and Dion, 2004; Ritter, 2006).

Competitiveness and survival of businesses, especially in the catering market, depend on the efficiency of supply chain management. This requires the enterprises to rely on modern management concepts that introduce a partnership philosophy to underpin the supply chains and decisions made by participants in market processes. That means innovative activities such as contracting with specialized suppliers, outsourcing, rapid inventory turnover in the supply chain, Efficient Consumer Response (ECR), QR (Quick Response), JiT (Just in Time), Supply Chain Operation Reference (SCOR), and analyzing the response and flexibility of the supply chain. These concepts are based on mutual trust, partnership and respect for the interests of each participant. They were designed to improve the distribution process (including a quick response to the needs of participants) and maximize profits throughout the product flow. Though highly useful (especially for perishable products such as food) and rich in benefits for chain participants, these solutions are not widely adopted (Nowicka, 2011; Tul-Krzyszczuk and Krajewski, 2014).

They require specific operational capabilities, i.e. short time horizons, full access to information, uniform and integrated logistics networks, continuous improvement of production and storage processes, including elimination of waste, as well as full cooperation between producers and retailers, redesign of manufacturing operations and processes or comprehensive quality management (Coyle et al., 2010).

These strategies are an effective response to the needs of consumers (in this case, buyers) or an effective customer service in distribution processes (especially when food products are involved). In addition, they allow to determine the efficiency of the supply chain and the desired future status; internal company goals or management style; and the scope of IT solutions and operational processes used (Imai, 2006; Antos and Antos, 2013; Tul-Krzyszczuk and Krajewski, 2014).

The development of ICT provides great support for management methods in the supply chain as it creates many adaptation options for partner relationships (Nguyen et al., 2007; Otto, 2004). Solutions used by distribution channels include technologies supporting efficient management of the delivery process, i.e. database technologies, computer-aided teamwork, agent technologies, integrated IT systems or automatic data identification systems. Today, information and knowledge processing tools offer a myriad of sophisticated options, and therefore transaction systems equipped with an e-platform should feature stronger mechanisms of relationship management (Filipkowski, 2015).

FOOD SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CATERING MARKET

The choice of and cooperation with the right supplier of raw food materials ensures continuous production, as necessary for the proper functioning of a catering establishment. This is one of the key aspects of competitiveness, especially important in delivering short shelf-life products which require proper transport and storage conditions. With trusted and proven suppliers, catering operators are able to meet the changing needs of increasingly demanding consumers who have come to expect higher-quality products and services (Tul-Krzyszczuk, 2016; Tul-Krzyszczuk et al., 2017; Stangierska et al., 2018).

The main task of the supplier (i.e. producer, distributor or service provider) is to deliver certain products (raw materials) at the right time to the buyer's premises (as provided for in the relevant contract). In the case of a catering establishment, the suppliers may be wholesalers (general or specialized, e.g. offering drinks, alcohol, fruits and vegetables, or machines and devices), wholesale centers, wholesale markets, commodity exchanges, as well as food processing plants (e.g. meat or dairy processors etc.), retailers (general or specialized)

or machine and equipment manufacturers (Szymanowski, 2008).

In practice, catering establishments, depending on the situation, may combine different ways of delivering food products. For instance, they can buy products from a regular supplier and supplement it with goods purchased in a retail store or at a nearby marketplace. Wholesalers such as Cash and Carry (e.g. Macro, Selgros) allow purchases of larger quantities of food in bigger packaging together with household chemicals, office supplies and small equipment.

This is a particularly important source of supply for small catering establishments, cafés or buffets. Some catering companies (in hotels or specialist kitchens) use direct supplies of unique, often refined raw materials (e.g. exotic cuisine ingredients) or catering devices from international importers (Tul-Krzyszczuk, 2016; Stangierska et al., 2018).

ANALYSIS OF SUPPLIER RELATIONSHIPS IN CATERING ESTABLISHMENTS BASED ON THE AUTHORS' OWN RESEARCH

One of the key drivers of competitiveness for catering establishments is the selection of and cooperation with an appropriate supplier of raw materials (especially including fresh food) which will ensure continuous production as necessary for the functioning of the establishment. Most owners or managers (ca. 65%) of catering premises surveyed buy from a small group of well-known suppliers or only from regular suppliers (ca. 29%). In this industry, only a few operators (ca. 6%) buy from other, less known suppliers.

Owners of dining venues attach great importance to relationships with trusted suppliers, especially with those of strategic importance. Cooperation with many suppliers provides an opportunity to negotiate the best prices for high-quality products and reduces the risk of shortage of specific raw materials needed for on-time production (e.g. in the JiT system). However, it increases the load and costs of the supply system (transport, storage, etc.).

Usually, large enterprises cooperate with the largest number of suppliers, while medium and small ones largely rely on their own transport. It is therefore important to develop the principles of long-term cooperation with suppliers of key products, and a flexible

procurement system aligned with production volumes (Tul-Krzyszczuk et al., 2017; Stangierska et al., 2018).

In recent years, the role of direct deliveries has been consistently growing due to convenience and ease of supply, especially in the case of long-term orders, in larger quantities or smaller orders, but with a higher frequency, e.g. several times a day, as in the JiT system (just in time, for fresh products). Owners of catering establishments usually rely on wholesalers to ensure the delivery of goods ordered, or buy it directly from the producers. Specialized or regional products are mostly sold by small local suppliers. In recent years, the role of Makro Cash and Carry and Selgros has been growing, especially in such categories as meat, dairy and frozen food (Imai, 2006; Antos and Antos, 2013; Tul-Krzyszczuk, 2016; Tul-Krzyszczuk et al., 2017; Zimna, 2017; Stangierska et al., 2018).

In 2014–2016, the enterprises surveyed established or redesigned their relationships with existing clients or suppliers (i.e. partnerships, according to ca. 25% of replies) or with other companies or public institutions (i.e. alliances, subcontracting; ca. 11%). Catering managers also strengthened these relationships by implementing methods that support management and service delivery, namely: Efficient Consumer Response (ECR) or fast inventory turnover in the supply chain (about 16% of replies), TQM, QR or Benchmarking (about 15%) and SCOR or JiT (ca. 7%). The use of state-of-the-art concepts for procurement management brings many benefits to the company, including: reduction of inventories, increase in sales, better production and sales planning, accelerated flow of goods, lower total costs, elimination of waste, paper transactions and greater customer satisfaction through improved service levels. Cooperation in an integrated supply chain consists in joint problem-solving and continuous improvement of the production system. This requires the employees to constantly improve their skills, qualifications and multi-functionality (Coyle et al., 2010; Tul-Krzyszczuk and Krajewski, 2014).

Most of the catering enterprises surveyed mentioned the estimated outcomes of introducing the abovementioned innovations, including in business relationships. These were not spectacular achievements, usually not exceeding 30%, as shown in Table 1. Due to an efficient partnership with contractors, catering establishments increased their prestige by 10–30% (ca. 25%), extended their product service range (ca. 22%, mainly due to attractive prices offered by suppliers, with $p = 0.022$,

Table 1. Effects of innovative activities in business relationships of catering enterprises in 2014–2016 (N = 99)

Specification	Effects					Years of market activity		Scope of business activity		Financial condition	
	NC*	< 10%	10–30%	30–50%	> 50%	p	V**	p	V	p	V
			%								
1. Extending the product/service range	16	15	21	11	8	0.002	0.279	0.319	ns	0.032	0.229
2. Improved production (service) flexibility	17	24	12	15	3	0.016	0.250	0.021	0.246	0.864	ns
3. Greater market share	22	14	17	14	5	0.02	0.246	0.872	ns	0.36	ns
4. Increased production (service) capacity	25	13	12	18	5	0.209	ns	0.504	ns	0.217	ns
5. Greater prestige	21	10	25	8	7	0.038	0.233	0.08	ns	0.596	ns
6. Reduced number and costs of complaints	35	7	9	12	9	0.089	ns	0.05	0.230	0.488	ns
7. Increased market competitiveness	20	18	14	12	8	0.283	ns	0.018	0.249	0.48	ns

*NC: no change; ** Cramer's V contingency coefficient; ns: no statistically significant relationship at $p < 0.05$
 Source: own study, 2014–2016.

V = 0.272) and increased their market shares (ca. 17%), primarily due to a broad assortment of products (with $p = 0.036$, $V = 0.249$) and prices offered by suppliers (with $p = 0.039$, $V = 0.246$). Note that some of the companies surveyed estimated the effects of introducing innovative solutions at above 30% or even 50%, mainly in the following areas: improved production and service capacity; reduced number and costs of complaints; increased market competitiveness; and greater production (service) flexibility.

According to the statistical analysis, a relationship exists between the years of market activity, scope of business activity and the financial condition of the catering company and the effects of the implementation of innovative solutions for relationships. The longer the years of market activity, the greater the percentage of enterprises with a declared effect of changes at a level above 10%, related mainly to the extension of the product and service range, greater operational flexibility, increased market share and stronger competitiveness in the market. An improvement in the market position was especially pronounced for “young” establishments with little experience (Table 1).

Significantly, a correlation also occurs between the scope of business activity and the increase in the production (service) flexibility and market competitiveness and the reduction in the number and costs of complaints (Table 1). Companies who did not experience

any changes (or experienced an effect of up to 10%) were primarily those operating in the local market (within a city or district¹) and declaring to be in a poor financial condition. Stronger effects of improved relationships were witnessed by branches operating in the domestic market. Meanwhile, local companies did not notice any spectacular changes. Similarly, the better the financial standing of a catering establishment, the more often the range of products and services offered was increased (mainly at the level of 10–30%).

A large number of respondents declared improvements in the range of products and services, flexibility, prestige and market share. This suggests that the innovative measures adopted by the enterprises surveyed consist in implementing improvements and taking actions.

The findings from the authors' own research corroborate previous scientific reports on the impact of increased innovative activity of enterprises, including in the area of supplier relationships. These activities are taken to make the products and services more attractive and to improve operational flexibility and, as a consequence, to better meet the needs and satisfy the widest possible group of customers. As a result, companies strengthen their position or create new sales markets to drive prestige and competitiveness. Partnerships helps optimize inventory management by identifying the

¹ The primary territorial sub-unit in Poland.

causes of inventory accumulation, eliminating excessive stock and enabling appropriate stock allocation in the supply chain (Tul-Krzyszczuk and Krajewski, 2014; Ocicka and Raźniewska, 2015; HoReCa..., 2018).

The selection of suppliers is determined by many factors (Table 2). According to the owners of catering establishments surveyed, the most important one is the high quality of products (an average score of 4.58 in a five-point scale with 1 = least important and 5 = most important), timeliness and frequency of deliveries (4.44), direct contact via phone or Internet (4.38), and a wide range of products (4.35). Advantageous terms of delivery and extended payment deadlines also played an important role. In contrast to previous research (Frontczak, 2015; Czerski, 2017; Szot, 2018), attractive prices, with an average score of 4.34, ranked only as the 5th most important factor according to catering managers. According to 2014–2017 HoReCa Suppliers' Market Reports, the most important factor (other than the quality of goods offered) in choosing a supplier was usually the price. Ranked next were the speed and timeliness of deliveries, the proximity of the supplier, and a wide range of goods offered for delivery to a catering establishment.

As revealed from statistical analysis of research findings, a relationship exists between some determinants of supplier's choice and the years of market activity, scope of business activity and the financial condition of the catering company (as shown in Table 2). Products offered in suitable collective packaging were ranked the highest by the youngest and oldest establishments exhibiting a wider scope of business activity and a better financial condition. Similarly, special discounts offered by suppliers were considered more important by enterprises with a national or international reach (rather than by local companies) and by those in a better financial condition. The better the financial condition of an enterprise, the more emphasis is placed on timeliness and frequency of deliveries; lower, attractive prices; and extended payment deadlines for goods ordered when choosing a supplier.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze supplier-buyer relationships in catering enterprises, taking into account the differences in years of market activity, scope of business activity and financial condition. The results of this analysis confirm the research hypothesis advanced

Table 2. Determinants of raw material supplier selection in catering establishments in 2014–2016

Specification	N	Average*	Years of market activity		Scope of business activity		Financial condition	
			p	V**	p	V	p	V
1. High quality of products	86	4.58	0.338	ns	0.965	ns	0.438	ns
2. Timeliness and frequency of deliveries	87	4.44	0.096	ns	0.595	ns	0.046	0.278
3. Direct contact (via phone or Internet)	87	4.38	0.062	ns	0.764	ns	0.368	ns
4. Wide range of products offered	84	4.35	0.064	ns	0.292	ns	0	0.623
5. Attractive prices	86	4.34	0.571	ns	0.534	ns	0.007	0.328
6. Advantageous terms of delivery	87	4.22	0.108	ns	0.138	ns	0.06	ns
7. Extended payment deadlines	87	3.28	0.446	ns	0.316	ns	0.039	0.281
8. Innovative products	84	3.54	0.323	ns	0.933	ns	0.456	ns
9. Discounts	84	3.44	0.674	ns	0.025	0.31	0.008	0.315
10. Bulk packaging	86	3.08	0.003	0.342	0.012	0.32	0.047	0.277
11. Various forms of advertising	84	2.77	0.877	ns	0.676	ns	0.246	ns

*Average score in a five-point scale, with 1 = least important and 5 = most important.

** Cramer's V contingency coefficient; ns: no statistically significant relationship at $p < 0.05$

Source: own study, 2014–2016.

earlier in this paper. The choice of and cooperation with the right supplier of raw materials (especially food) ensures continuous production, as necessary for the proper functioning of a catering establishment. As a highly valued aspect, the enterprises surveyed indicated direct cooperation with suppliers and building sustainable loyalty with them. They mostly relied on services delivered by a small group of well-known, proven regular suppliers. In this industry, only a few operators bought from other, less known suppliers.

Owners of food and beverage outlets attached great importance to relationships with trusted suppliers, especially with those of strategic importance. In recent years, they have strengthened their relationships with existing customers, suppliers, other companies and public institutions, including through the implementation of ECR, rapid inventory turnover in the supply chain, TQM, QR, Benchmarking, SCOR and JiT. Usually, large enterprises cooperated with the largest number of suppliers, while medium and small ones largely relied on their own transport. This has brought considerable effects to operators, i.e. an extended offering, improved flexibility, higher production and service capacity, larger market shares and more prestige. In addition, the use of state-of-the-art concepts for procurement management brings many benefits to the company, such as reduction of inventories, increase in sales, better production and sales planning, accelerated flow of goods, lower total costs, elimination of waste and greater customer satisfaction through improved service levels.

The choice of suppliers is decisive for many aspects, including product quality, timeliness and frequency of deliveries; the ability to establish direct contacts with the supplier; the range of products offered; and, finally, attractive prices. Advantageous terms of delivery and extended payment deadlines also played an important role. Special price offers (discounts) proposed by suppliers were considered the most important by enterprises with a national or international reach and by those in a better financial condition. Products offered in suitable collective packaging were ranked the highest by the youngest and oldest establishments exhibiting a wider scope of business activity and a better financial condition. The better the financial condition of an enterprise, the more emphasis is placed on timeliness and frequency of deliveries and extended payment deadlines for goods ordered when choosing a supplier.

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RELACJE DOSTAWCA – NABYWCA W PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWIE GASTRONOMICZNYM

Abstrakt. Celem opracowania była analiza relacji dostawca – nabywca w przedsiębiorstwie gastronomicznych. Jako metodę badawczą zastosowano indywidualne wywiady ustrukturyzowane przeprowadzone z 99 menadżerami przedsiębiorstw gastronomicznych w okresie 2014–2016. Wśród respondentów wysoko oceniono bezpośrednią współpracę z dostawcami oraz budowanie z nimi trwałych więzów lojalnościowych. W ostatnich latach przedsiębiorstwa gastronomiczne umacniały relacje z dotychczasowymi klientami, dostawcami, innymi firmami lub instytucjami publicznymi, m.in. poprzez wdrożenie systemów: ECR, szybkiej rotacji w łańcuchu dostaw, TQM, QR, Benchmarking, SCOR czy JiT. Działania te przyniosły podmiotom niemałe efekty, tj. zwiększenie asortymentu oferty, elastyczności i zdolności produkcyjnej oraz usługowej, udziałów, a także prestiżu na rynku. Wybór dostawców determinowała jakość, terminowość i częstotliwość dostaw, możliwość bezpośredniego kontaktu z dostawcą, szeroki asortyment oferty produktowej, atrakcyjne ceny oraz dogodne warunki dostawy i wydłużony termin płatności.

Słowa kluczowe: relacje, partnerstwo, dostawca, nabywca, przedsiębiorstwa gastronomiczne, zarządzanie dostawami