



**SWP 7/99 A MULTIPLE, EMBEDDED CASE STUDY OF
CONTEMPORARY PRACTICES OF
RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN THE DANISH-
BRITISH AND NEW ZEALAND-BRITISH FOOD
SUPPLY CHAINS: A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

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A Multiple, Embedded Case Study of
Contemporary Practices of Relationship Marketing in the
Danish-British and New Zealand-British Food Supply Chains:
A Research Methodology

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ABSTRACT

Relationship marketing remains an ambiguous concept although it was introduced more than fifteen years ago. The researchers are currently studying contemporary activities of relational marketing in the international food supply chain in an effort to better understand relationship marketing. Firstly, the concept of relationship marketing and the contextual setting for the research project are introduced to the reader. Secondly, the research methodology is discussed at length. Thirdly, the anticipated contributions of the research project are outlined.

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INTRODUCTION

The paper first briefly introduces to the reader the concept of relationship marketing, the contextual setting for the research project and the problems and research questions. Although the literature on relationship marketing is large and expanding, empirical work still needs to be done into both the nature of relationship marketing and the factors which are likely to determine the effectiveness with which it is practised. The Danish-British and New Zealand-British food supply chains are identified as a suitable contextual setting for the research project: the British food market is an international market with both domestic and foreign participants, and the similarities *and* differences between Denmark and New Zealand, two of the major food producers and exporters for the British consumer, allow for a robust multiple case study design. The paper then discusses the research methodology in great depth and outlines the anticipated contributions of the research project. Forthcoming papers will be devoted to the literature review, the data collection and analysis and the conclusions. Figure 1 depicts the simplified model of the overall research process which has guided the composition of the paper.

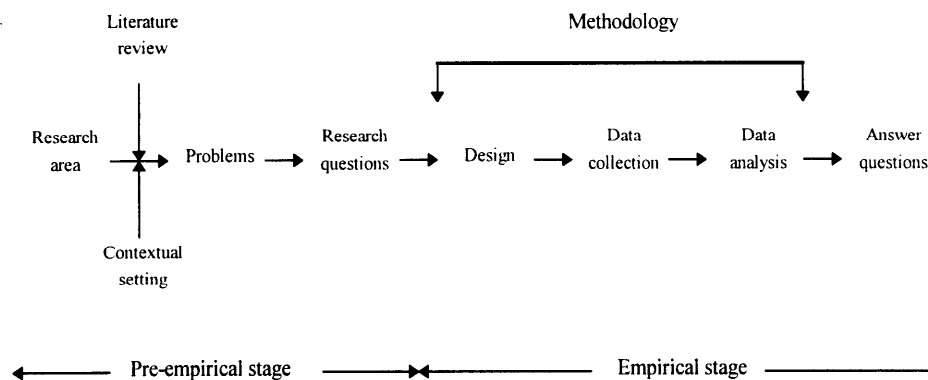


FIGURE 1. Simplified model of the overall research process

Source: Adapted from Punch (1998: 42)

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research area is relationship marketing. The term “relationship marketing” was first coined by Berry (1983: 25) more than fifteen years ago:

“Relationship marketing is attracting, maintaining and - in multi-service organizations - enhancing customer relationships. Servicing and selling existing customers is viewed to be just as important to long-term marketing success as acquiring new customers.”

Since then, relationship marketing has received widespread *literary* attention (see, for example, Christopher *et al.* 1991; Grönroos 1994; Gummesson 1995; Jackson 1985; Morgan *et al.* 1994; Möller *et al.* 1998; Weitz *et al.* 1995).

It is interesting to note, however, that relationship marketing is more often described with respect to its purposes and instruments than its defining constructs (Figure 2). Relationship marketing has thus been described as both direct

marketing/database marketing (Copulsky *et al.* 1990; Fletcher *et al.* 1990), quality management (Ballantyne *et al.* 1995; Gummesson 1988), services marketing (Berry 1983; Rust *et al.* 1993), customer partnering (Anderson *et al.* 1990; Magrath *et al.* 1994) and “catch-all phrases” covering many different marketing disciplines (Gummesson 1994a; Morgan *et al.* 1994). Also the purposes of relationship marketing have been numerous, for example customer retention (Buchanan *et al.* 1990; Dawkins *et al.* 1990), share of customer (Hammond *et al.* 1995; Johnson 1992) and the all embracing concepts of customer loyalty and employee loyalty (Reichheld 1996).

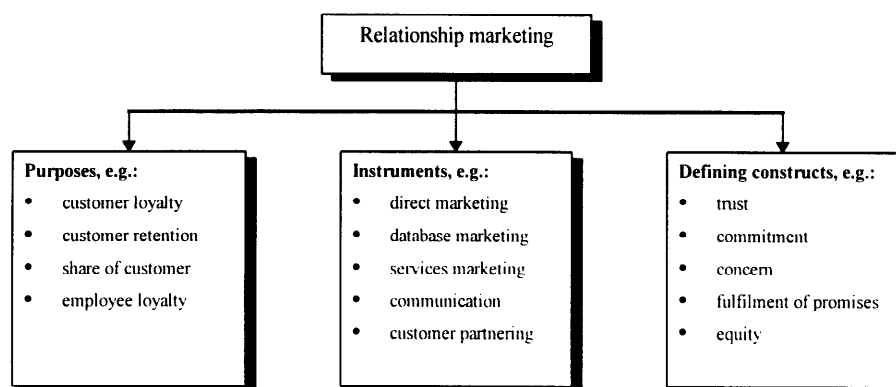


FIGURE 2. “Breakdown” of relationship marketing

Source: Lindgreen *et al.* (1999a)

As a result, no “best practice” has been promoted although several approaches have been proposed (e.g., DeSouza 1992; Rosenberg *et al.* 1984; Stone *et al.* 1995). Indeed, Grande (1996) and Pinto (1996) have suggested that no guidelines exist that guarantee an effective implementation of a programme of relationship marketing, and writers such as Jones *et al.* (1995) and Stewart (1997) have questioned that returns on relationship marketing be well correlated to customer satisfaction and/or customer loyalty.

CONTEXTUAL SETTING

It has been noted that buyers and sellers are forming closer ties (Ellram 1992; Grønnegaard 1998; Lewin *et al.* 1997; Morris *et al.* 1987). For example, retailers work together with their suppliers to secure that specifications are met at all times (i.e., high quality and consistency) and that ordering, delivery and services systems of the retailers and suppliers are integrated (i.e., competitive prices). Of particular interest are relationships between buyers and sellers from *different* countries one of the reasons being the physical distance and cultural gap. However, only few studies have empirically examined the role and nature of relationships in international partnerships (e.g., Ahmed *et al.* 1998; Madsen 1994).

The contextual setting for the research project is the Danish-British and New Zealand-British food supply chains. One of the world’s largest food and drink exporters, Britain still imports products from sectors where it does not have an inherent competitive disadvantage. For example, the country imports 66 per cent of its annual tomato consumption, and more than 49 per cent of those imports

come from the Netherlands. The reasons for the strong Dutch position are said to be associated with relationships between the British and Dutch businesses as opposed to efficiency of production (Shaw 1994; Woolven 1996). The same is the case with Denmark and New Zealand, two of the major food producers and exporters for the British consumer (Table 1).

TABLE 1. The Danish-British and New Zealand-British food supply chains

The Danish-British food supply chain	The New Zealand-British food supply chain
<p>Overview: Total agricultural exports in Denmark are valued at almost DKK 100 billion per annum, equal to over 30 per cent of the country's total export earnings. Meat and dairy products are among the most important exports. Since the end of the 19th century, Britain has long been one of the major markets for Danish foodstuffs (Danske Slagterier 1998; Tansey <i>et al.</i> 1995).</p> <p>Pig Meat: At DKK 25 billion per annum, pig meat exports equate to about 8 per cent of Denmark's total export earnings. About 80 per cent of Danish pig meat is exported with two-thirds going to EU countries (Boon 1998; Danske Slagterier 1998). In terms of value, nearly 19 per cent of total pig meat exports and about 90 per cent of total bacon exports are for the British market (Andersen 1998; Danske Slagterier 1998).</p> <p>Dairy: 73 per cent of the Danish milk production and 85 per cent of the Danish cheese exports are controlled by MD Foods. Almost 70 per cent of the company's foreign trade is created in EU countries with Germany and Britain among the major markets. The British market is the single largest market for MD Foods' butter and an increasingly important market for its cheese products. Also, the company is the third largest milk producer in Britain (MD Foods 1997, 1998).</p>	<p>Overview: Total agricultural exports in New Zealand are valued at almost NZ\$ 20 billion per annum, equal to about 60 per cent of the country's total export earnings. Meat and dairy products are among the most important exports. For more than 150 years, Britain has been among New Zealand's major markets (American Embassy 1997; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1988).</p> <p>Lamb and Mutton: Meat products are New Zealand's largest export earner. 83 per cent of the lamb production and 64 per cent of the mutton production are exported overseas with the British market importing 34 per cent of the lamb exports and 40 per cent of the mutton exports (New Zealand Official Yearbook 1996).</p> <p>Dairy: The major part of the dairy production is geared toward overseas markets. New Zealand's share of the internationally traded dairy market is estimated at 30 per cent with the British market importing 18 per cent of the butter production and 6 per cent of the cheese production (American Embassy 1997; Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries 1998).</p>

Although Denmark and New Zealand have trading patterns similar in many respects, the marketing philosophy and way of conducting business may be different from each other (Coviello *et al.* 1998; Rasmussen 1998). For example, the resemblance between New Zealand and Britain in legal and accounting systems as well as in business practice makes Britain an ideal country in which New Zealand farmers can introduce their products or increase their current sales (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1988). As we shall see in the papers on the data collection and analysis, the similarities (e.g., between Danish food exporters) and the differences (e.g., between Danish and New Zealand food exporters) allow for a robust multiple case study design.

PROBLEMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Despite a large and continuously expanding literature, relationship marketing thus remains a nebulous concept. This results in a number of problems, or opportunities for the researchers. For example, Buttle (1996), Gummesson (1994b) and Snehota *et al.* (1998) all note that there is no consensus as to a definition. Also, there are no theories, or even guidelines, to direct practitioners when developing, implementing and monitoring programmes of relationship marketing or when measuring the effectiveness of such programmes.

In an effort to better understand relationship marketing, the researchers are currently studying contemporary activities of relational marketing. They do so by addressing four major research questions:

- Are there identifiable activities which can be presented as substantive evidence of the practice of relationship marketing itself?
- Are there identifiable patterns in the way activities of relationship marketing are implemented and if so can any of these be promoted as “best practice”?
- How, if at all, can programmes of relationship marketing be monitored?
- In what way(s), if at all, might returns on relationship marketing be measured?

METHODOLOGY

As we shall see later, the case research method is the most appropriate research strategy to investigate the phenomenon of relationship marketing. In the following discussion of the methodology four subjects are considered: (1) justification of the paradigm, (2) justification of the case research method, (3) case study design and (4) theory development from case study data.

Justification of the Paradigm

Two of the major approaches to the building and testing of theory are deductivism and inductivism (Figure 3) (Bonoma 1985; Neuman 1997; Parkhe 1993; Romano 1989). The deductive approach represents the positivist paradigm and the inductive approach represents the phenomenological paradigm which can be further divided into critical theory, constructivism and realism (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 1991; Guba *et al.* 1994; Perry 1998).

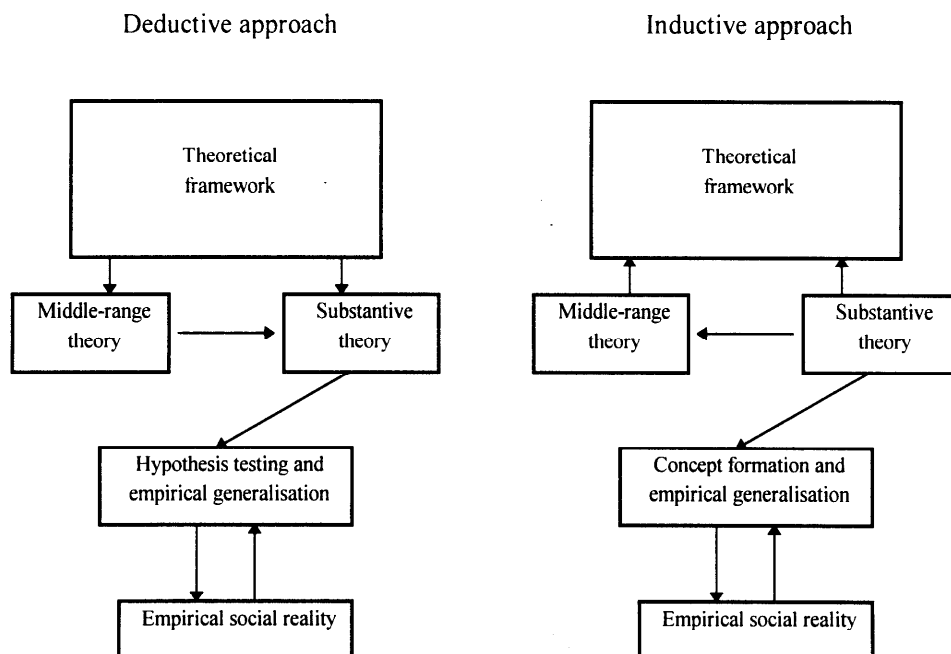


FIGURE 3. Deductive and inductive building and testing of theory

Source: Adapted from Neuman (1997: 47)

For several reasons, realism is the appropriate epistemological guide for the case research method. Relationship marketing is contemporary and pre-paradigmatic: There is no consensus as to what it constitutes, and no accepted principles and/or constructs have been established. All of this makes it difficult, if not impossible, to begin with a theory or a set of hypotheses as in deductivism. Moreover, in contrast to critical theory and constructivism, realism does not suffer from the limitations of relativism: According to realism, there is an external reality which can be reached by collecting observable *and* “unobservable” phenomena (e.g., perceptions from respondents). Finally, in the case research method findings are evaluated by ways of reliability and validity, consideration of research topic and methodology, peer and examiner reviews, etc. This evaluation is not so evident in critical theory and constructivism.

However, it is unlikely that inductivism and deductivism can be separated from each other (Glaser *et al.* 1967; Miles *et al.* 1994; Parkhe 1993). Indeed, Miles *et al.* (1994) and Parkhe (1993) note that both extremes are untenable and unnecessary. The building and testing of theory by inductivism *and* deductivism is consistent with the paradigm of realism which searches for capabilities, not regularities (Tsoukas 1989) and analytic generalisation, not statistical generalisation (Yin 1994).

For the first part of the research project (i.e., the Danish-British food supply chain), inductivism is appropriate because the main objective is *to unearth and gather* as much detailed evidence of contemporary practices of relationship marketing as possible, almost at *face value*, as well as to *explore* emergent themes. Only then can propositions, hypotheses and theories be developed. For the second part of the research project (i.e., the New Zealand-British food supply chain), a combination of inductivism and deductivism is apt. Findings, an initial framework and a number of hypotheses from the first part of the project can be further supported/rejected and/or tested. For example, case research interviews will include *unstructured questions* but also *probe questions* in order to raise respondents’ perceptions about concerns in the prior theory. In order to aid the interview protocol the case research method will involve pilot tests; in general, the design of a case study will be shaped by prior case studies. Finally, convergent interviews with practitioners will be built into the design at the same time as the literature’s prior theory is being reviewed (Nair *et al.* 1995; Perry 1998; Yin 1994).

Illustration In monitoring the programme of relationship marketing at Flensted Catering A/S four measurements were used: customer loyalty, customer retention, share of customer and employee satisfaction (Lindgreen *et al.* 1999b, the first case study in the project). Further inductive research found that approach to be inappropriate in the Danish pig industry (Lindgreen *et al.* 1999c, the second case study in the project). A working hypothesis for this discrepancy is: There are different approaches to monitoring relationship marketing, and the nature of the business (e.g., the size of the customer base) will determine which approach is the most appropriate. This and other hypotheses will be tested through further case studies.

Justification of the Case Research Method

A large number of research strategies for collecting and analysing empirical evidence in social science are available. However, for probing into the research questions the case research method is considered the most suitable strategy. Because relationship marketing is contemporary, pre-paradigmatic and on-going it must be investigated within its real-life context. This allows little prospect of simplifying matters by excluding some variables whilst controlling and manipulating others, however, but the case research method facilitates the exploration of complex social processes by taking a holistic perspective on real-life events with all of their potentially rich and meaningful characteristics intact. Uniquely, the method avoids the need to preselect the context type variables to be included in the investigations. Instead the researcher observes the important contextual variables impinging on the behaviour of interest, over time.

Illustration The business culture and the structure of production and marketing systems in both Denmark and New Zealand are contextual variables with a possible significant effect on the adoption and implementation of relationship marketing. For example, employee empowerment is a frequent element of programmes of relational marketing and therefore relationship marketing may be easier to implement in Denmark than in other countries because Denmark has a long tradition of empowering its workforce. The diverse nature of the two countries' major markets for food products are also among the contextual variables. Finally, the research questions with their *What's* (e.g., In what way(s), if at all, might returns on relationship marketing be monitored?) and *How's* (e.g., How, if at all, can programmes of relationship marketing be measured?) point toward the case research method, too.

Case Study Design

Careful consideration should be given to the design of the case study. The aim is not to investigate an *extreme*, *unique* or *revelatory* case but to build up evidence of contemporary practices of relationship marketing. Because of that, the study will involve a number of programmes of relational marketing activities in the Danish-British and New Zealand-British food supply chains (i.e., *multiple case study*). The case study design is further defined by the unit of analysis used by the researcher. For the purposes of this research, the primary unit of analysis is the individual Danish or New Zealand food producer/exporter, subsequently the British food importer. Sub-units are the marketing philosophy, the marketing activities directed at building relations with customers and other "markets", etc. (*embedded case study*).

Many research investigators have viewed case studies as a less desirable form of inquiry than, say, surveys. The main concern has been the question of validity when drawing conclusions from a small number of case. However, case studies are generalisable to theoretical propositions and not to populations, and like the experimental researcher the case study researcher's aim is to expand and generalise theories, not to enumerate frequencies (Crawford 1997; Neuman 1997; Yin 1994). The criticism of the case research method is to some extent overcome

by evaluating a case by means of reliability and validity (Table 2). Overall, emergent theories will be fully grounded in empirical data and not bound to a specific context such as the Danish pig industry or the New Zealand dairy sector.

Illustration The main objective is to gather experience from programmes of relational marketing activities. Rather than making standardised and systematic comparisons between programmes, each case will study programmes in detail, holistically and in its context. Case studies will be constructed from qualitative data (dominant paradigm) and quantitative data (alternative paradigm). This approach has been termed a *dominant/less-dominant design* (Creswell 1994). Because qualitative methods are flexible they are well suited for studying real-life events and they also accommodate the local “groundedness” of the things they study. Qualitative data include detailed descriptions of relational marketing plans, joint buyer-seller performance reviews, customer-focused staff training, etc. Quantitative data include developments in customer retention, customer loyalty, share of customer, etc. (For the issue of triangulation, see the Within-case Analysis section.)

TABLE 2. Reliability and validity

Issue	Way of securing...
Reliability	The measures applied to increase the reliability of the data will include: the development of clearly conceptualised constructs, the use of multiple indicators and the execution of pilot tests. Overall, the interviews are conducted and analysed by the first author (using a specific coding scheme, see later) who then pass it on to the second author who carries out an independent analysis using the same coding scheme. The two sets of analysis are then compared for “goodness-of-fit” and disparities reconciled through a third data interpreter. This process resembles the <i>debriefing by peer</i> technique as proposed by Lincoln <i>et al.</i> (1985).
Construct validity	is secured through the use of multiple sources of evidence. Also, subsequent studies will seek to replicate and extend research findings, and key informants are invited to review drafts of each case study report.
Content validity	is pursued by asking the interviewees what they understand by the term relationship marketing before probing them to determine which activities they see as part of relationship marketing. These procedures are used to “bridge” any confusion between definition and measures.
Internal validity	is a concern only for explanatory case studies, not for exploratory or descriptive case studies which do not attempt to make causal statements. In broad outline, the first part of the research project is exploratory/descriptive whereas the second part of the project is explanatory. One tactic for achieving internal validity is by rival explanations as patterns, the focus on how and why a certain outcome occurred in each of the cases.
Interpretive validity	is accomplished by approaching key informants for a second, or even third, interview when points raised in a discussion of a programme have been ambiguous, as well as by inviting the informants to review a draft of the case study report.
Contextual validity	is sought by tape-recording the interviews for later transcription.
External validity	is sharpened with the specification of the particular population of interest.

Theory Development from Case Study Data

In this section the process for how theory will be developed from case research data is explained.

Step 1: Getting Started

To avoid loss of research focus four main research questions have been defined (see Step 3). Also, potentially important constructs with reference to extant literature have been specified in order to help *shape* the initial process of building theories (Table 3). It must be stressed that these constructs (and the research questions, too) are only tentative. Thus no construct is guaranteed a place in a resultant theory, and it may be necessary to shift the research questions during the research. The table exemplifies how an interview is looking for these and other constructs.

TABLE 3. Some constructs in relationship marketing and their “look-outs”

Construct	Interview “look-outs”	General references
Dependence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the benefits and features your “best” supplier is offering?• Which people, information and organisations do you rely on?	Dwyer <i>et al.</i> (1987); Frazier (1983); Heide <i>et al.</i> (1988); Williamson (1985)
Trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are the similarities and differences between the products from your “best” and “worst” suppliers?• What are the short-term and long-term goals of your customers/suppliers?	Anderson <i>et al.</i> (1990); Ganesan (1994); Moorman <i>et al.</i> (1992)
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• During periods of market or price volatility, how are inventories purchased and held?• How can the customer/supplier relationships where you explore possibilities to decrease costs and increase efficiencies be described?	Anderson <i>et al.</i> (1992)
Co-operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How are problems between the two parties in the dyad resolved?• How are new generations of products developed?	Anderson <i>et al.</i> (1990); Morgan <i>et al.</i> (1994)
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is (are) the outcome(s) of close customer/supplier relationships?• What is (are) the outcome(s) of occasional customer/supplier relationships?	Ganesan (1994)

Step 2: Selecting Cases

It is important to note that random sampling is neither necessary, nor preferable (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 1994). Cases will be chosen for theoretical reasons: to replicate previous cases, to extend emergent theory, to fill theoretical categories, to provide examples of polar types, etc. In the instance of the Danish-British food supply chain, the population of interest was first specified: Danish food businesses with exports to the British food market. Then the sample of cases was determined: contacts were made to “actors” which claim to have installed relational marketing activities because those actors were theoretical useful (Table 4). The same approach will be used when selecting New Zealand food exporters. The similarities (e.g., between Danish food exporters) and the differences (e.g., between Danish and New Zealand food exporters) allow for a robust multiple case study design.

TABLE 4. Cases in the study

Denmark	New Zealand
<p>The food catering sector: Flensted Catering A/S is known to have implemented a relationship marketing programme (Christensen 1998; Hvidt <i>et al.</i> 1998; Laursen 1997). Fieldwork completed.</p> <p>The dairy sector: MD Foods is moving toward relationship marketing (MD Foods 1997). Fieldwork completed.</p> <p>The bacon sector: Danish Crown, ESS-Food, Tulip International and Vestjyske Slagterier are oriented strongly toward, among other markets, the British market (Boon 1998). Fieldwork completed.</p>	<p>No exporters either in the meat sector or in the dairy sector have yet been identified but New Zealand Meat Producers Board, New Zealand Dairy Board and other trade organisations will be contacted. In New Zealand, such marketing boards and export authorities influence around 80 per cent of agricultural and horticultural exports (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries 1998). The boards can point to organisations which have implemented relationship marketing or demonstrate relationship marketing. Fieldwork not yet started. Two cases in the meat sector and two cases in the dairy sector are likely to be the result of the research.</p>

The few studies undertaken on international buyer-seller relationships have most often collected data from a *single* partner in the dyad although Anderson (1994) has deemed it necessary to gather information from both partners in order to understand a relationship. This study addresses the research questions by contacting *both* sides of buyer-seller dyads in the food supply chains. This is arranged by networking from Danish (New Zealand) sellers toward British buyers.

Illustration In the second case study *The Federation of Danish Pig Producers and Slaughterhouses* and *The Danish Institute of Agricultural and Fisheries Economics* were contacted at the onset of the research. These meetings resulted in an overview of the Danish pig industry and a map of the major organisations in the industry, including a list of marketing directors and senior managers in those organisations. Interviews were then set up with these people to discuss their understanding and experiences of relational marketing activities. Toward the end of an interview the respondent was asked to name some of the organisation's more important customers (Lindgreen *et al.* 1998, 1999a).

Step 3: Crafting Instruments and Protocols

The study seeks to gather data of two types: basic characteristics of the food exporters (size, markets, revenues, product lines, etc.) and a thorough portrait of their relational marketing activities (marketing planning, product development, performance reviews, co-operation, communication, etc.). Although different sources provide information for the cases (e.g., material from the public domain such as conference papers, articles, and archival analysis such as the examination of a business' customer records, in-house documentation, newsletters, annual reports), the interview is the main source. This is in accordance with Perry (1998: 3) who has defined the case research method as "a research methodology based on interviews that is used in a postgraduate thesis involving a body of knowledge".

Illustration Because multiple case studies are prone to loss of focus, an interview protocol has been developed following the guidelines of Crawford (1997) and Yin (1994). Although the sequence of topics and questions is set up in a logical flow, the respondents dictate the sequence so as a more accurate, clear picture is obtained together with a collection of rich and valuable data (Table 5).

Step 4: Entering the Field

Respondents are contacted by telephone with a short introduction to the research project (as in this paper, pp. 2-5). When a contact has been established, the respondent is informed in full about the project by means of a covering letter including a case study on how one company understands relationship marketing (Lindgreen *et al.* 1999d). This should not cause bias when later the interview is conducted because the letter emphasises that there is no *one* right approach to relationship marketing. Respondents are interviewed by the first author involving multiple-hour sessions. Interviews are tape-recorded in order to ensure reliability and later transcribed to allow analysis. In order to probe emergent themes or to take advantage of special opportunities, the interview protocol is adjusted along with the interviews.

Illustration Exploratory studies revealed that in most cases organisations are not familiar with the term “relationship marketing”. If they are, the definition offered by Grönroos (1994: 355) describes the intention of their marketing activities well:

“[Relationship] Marketing is to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises. ... Such relationships are usually but not necessarily always long term.”

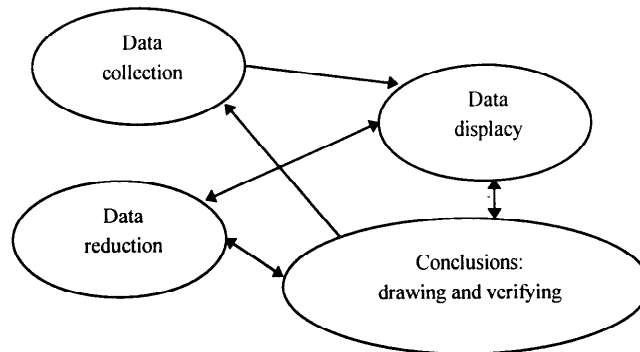
In order to get an interview started, the opening statement in an interview is an introduction of relationship marketing as Grönroos perceives it.

TABLE 5. Topics from the interview protocol

Research question	Topics
Are there identifiable activities which can be presented as substantive evidence of the practice of relationship marketing itself?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joint planning• Manufacturing to a customer's specifications• Negotiation of price, discounts, customer lists, etc.• Joint performance review• Information exchange• Just-in-time logistics
Are there identifiable patterns in the way activities of relationship marketing are implemented?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design, implementation, assessment and re-design• Company audits• Focus groups and questionnaires• Staff training• Communication
How, if at all, can programmes of relationship marketing be monitored?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customer retention• Customer loyalty (attraction and satisfaction)• Share of customer• Employee satisfaction• Value flow statement• Service tracking system• Complaint tracking system
In what way(s), if at all, might returns on relationship marketing be measured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lifetime value of customer• Strength of relationships• Non-opportunistic behaviour• Mutual benefits

The analysis of interview data is carried out in two stages, that is: (1) within-case analysis involving write-ups for each case and (2) cross-case analysis involving searches for cross-case patterns.

Within-case Analysis: Each individual case is analysed in a four-stage interactive process (Miles *et al.* 1994): (1) In the stage of *data collection*, qualitative and quantitative data are sought. (2) In the stage of *data reduction*, the volume of data is condensed. (3) In the stage of *data display*, extended texts, matrices, charts and network diagrams organise data which facilitate the process of analysis. (4) In the stage of *conclusions: drawing and verifying*, conclusions are tentative until they can be fully grounded in the data (Glaser *et al.* 1967) (Figure 4). Overall, interpretations are backed up through *triangulation*, that is: any claim is supported with multiple evidence (Yin 1994). This is one reason why a dominant/less-dominant research design is employed (Bryman 1988; Creswell 1994; Miles *et al.* 1994). [Of note: The use of triangulation in social research has been criticised (Blaikie 1991). The main critique has been that various theories and methods have different and incommensurate ontological and epistemological assumptions. The challenge of employing triangulation will be discussed in more depth in the reporting of each case study.]



Source: Adapted from Miles *et al.* (1994: 12)

The four-stage process involves three main operations: (1) coding (i.e., labelling data), (2) memoing (i.e., theorising ideas about codes and their relationships) and (3) developing propositions (Glaser 1978; Miles *et al.* 1994; Punch 1998). With regard to coding, the research starts with a *tabula rasa* and then moves toward a first set of codes after having conducted the first case study. Subsequently, an analysis derives a second set of codes which serves as an initial guiding coding scheme for the second case study, etc. There are a number of programmes to assist qualitative researchers in the analysis of data, for example Atlas /ti (for Windows 95 and NT), QSR NUD•IST 4 (for Windows and Macintosh) and The Ethograph (version 4.0, DOS-based application). QSR NUD•IST 4 appeared to be the most appropriate programme since it is the package most compatible with the interactive model (Miles *et al.* 1994) and the grounded theory (Glaser *et al.* 1967).

For an introduction to QSR NUD•IST 4, see Gahan *et al.* (1998). [Again, the challenge of within-case data analysis will be discussed in more depth in the reporting of each case study.]

Cross-case Analysis: Several tactics exist when the cases are to be cross analysed. One tactic is to look for intergroup differences in important dimensions. Another tactic is to list similarities and differences between sets of cases. Yet a third tactic is to divide the data by their source and then to establish whether the sources result in the same pattern (Eisenhardt 1989). All tactics will be employed in the research. [Again, the challenge of cross-case data analysis will be discussed in more depth in the reporting of each case study.]

Step 6: Shaping Hypotheses

Shaping hypotheses involves measuring constructs and verifying relationships. Thus the definition of a construct is refined, and evidence which measures that construct is built up. Also, each case of an emergent relationship between constructs must be backed by solid evidence. This verification process is similar to traditional hypothesis testing with each case serving to confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis (Yin 1994).

Step 7: Enfolding Literature

Emergent concepts, theories or hypotheses from the case studies will be compared with the extant literature in order to note consistencies with and departures from other findings. This process will enhance the internal validity, generalisability and theoretical level of theory building from case study research (Eisenhardt 1989).

Illustration The Flensted Catering A/S case study found that the presence of the managerial leadership, the level of back-up and resources given to project teams and the personal involvement of the marketing director in communicating the importance of relationship marketing are paramount. But the case study also suggested that returns on relationship marketing are well correlated to customer loyalty and customer satisfaction (Lindgreen *et al.* 1999b). These findings will be pursued in future case studies.

Step 8: Reaching Closure

Eisenhardt (1989) recommends that between four and ten cases be included in a multiple case study. With fewer than four cases it is difficult to generate theory and with more than ten cases the analysis becomes too complex. Ideally, the iteration between theory and data should stop when the incremental improvement to theory is minimal: tentative research questions direct the collection of a first set of data. Guided by theoretical developments from a first analysis of those data, a second set of data is collected. This cycle of data collection and data analysis will continue until theoretical saturation (Figure 5). It is probable, however, that time, a constraining factor, will determine when to reach closure.

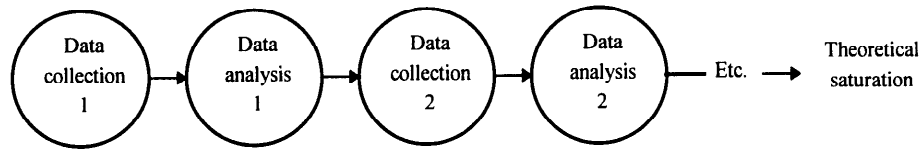


FIGURE 5. Theoretical sampling: cycle of alternation between data collection and data analysis

Source: Adapted from Punch (1998: 167)

CONCLUSION: ANSWER QUESTIONS

Perhaps it is appropriate to bring the paper to an end by reflecting on the nature of the findings likely to result from this specific research methodology. It is anticipated that the case studies will reveal a number of practical approaches to designing, implementing and monitoring programmes of relationship marketing and to measuring the effectiveness of such programmes. It is also believed that the studies will lead to theoretical hypotheses on “best practice” of relationship marketing.

NOTE

Earlier versions of the paper will be presented at the *Annual Conference of the Academy of Marketing* (Lindgreen 1999a) and the *Annual Conference of International Marketing and Purchasing* (Lindgreen 1999b).

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