ABSTRACT

Ongoing debate regarding relationships in marketing includes discussion on the most intangible but perhaps most critical of elements, that of relationship "atmosphere". This has been discussed in terms of trust, commitment, cooperation, power balance etc.. Relationship atmosphere is discussed relative to the role it plays in influencing exchange between the parties involved in the relationship and their behaviour. In particular relationship atmosphere plays an important role in setting the stage for future interaction between the parties and hence the continued state of the relationship.

However, atmosphere in the literature is generally referred to as an independent entity, emerging from interaction between two parties - supplier and customer- and other outside (network) influences. This paper adopts an alternative view of atmosphere, as a perception of each actor in the relationship, (ie a perceived atmosphere). Under these circumstances it would seem more appropriate to refer to dual atmosphere perceptions rather than one integrated 'atmosphere'. Differences or convergence of opinion on relationship atmosphere could then be taken into account when explaining relationship characteristics. Further complexity arises where tripartite relationships are involved, including intermediaries.

These issues are explored using data derived from data
collected within the framework of the IMP2 research project. Perceptions of atmosphere of different parties in specific relationships are compared and analysed, with respect to other relationship characteristics, in particular those related to present and future performance/contribution.

"In a mad world, only the mad are truly sane."