The Relationship Promoter -
Key Person for Inter-organisational Innovation Processes

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Abstract

Relationship promoters help to surmount the inter-organisational barriers "no knowledge of each other", "no ability", "no will" and "no permission to cooperate" by identifying external innovation partners, bringing them together, and promoting the dialogue and the exchange processes between them. Relationship promoters create the necessary conditions for successful innovation cooperation.
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1 Introduction

In traditional marketing, product innovation is considered to be a problem of the innovation offerer. Von Hippel (1978) sets this manufacturer-active paradigm against a customer-active paradigm. "Innovation by cooperation!" represents a promising third alternative, where the development, implementation and exploitation of innovative products and services can be seen as a task of the relationship and network management (Anderson et al. 1994; Gemünden 1981).

Numerous comprehensive studies on technologically oriented information and business relationships demonstrate that R&D cooperations with other enterprises, information exchange with clients, and technologically oriented exchange relationships with universities, colleges, and research institutes yield a strong positive influence on the technical and economic innovation success of enterprises (Gemünden et al 1992; Hagedoorn and Schakenraad 1994; Håkansson 1989).

A central deficit of all the research studies dealing with the development and formation of technologically oriented exchange relationships is that the studied partners are considered as institutions. The characteristics of individual persons who launch, advance, and put through or as well slow down and block cooperative innovations are neglected. Which performance contributions the key persons bring about and how they interact with each other remains open.

The research on innovation shows another picture. Here, promoters by authority and expertise as well as process and communication promoters and the corresponding opponents are studied intensively (Allen 1977; Chakrabarti and O'Keefe 1977; Chakrabarti and Hauschildt 1989; Howell and Higgins 1990; Katz and Tushman 1979; Markham et al 1991; Schon 1963; Witte 1977). These studies regularly concentrate on a specific organisation that brings about or takes over an innovation. The intra-organisational perspective prevails. Furthermore, the analysis of already existing inter-organisational role models and of the linking activities they perform shows that there are no satisfying models for cooperative innovation processes.

This paper wants to contribute to closing this gap by discussing the relationship promoter as a furtherer of innovation oriented business relationships.
2 Role models for inter-organisational interlinking performances

As early as in 1943 Kurt Lewin underlined the importance of the doorman when analysing the ways and channels of how foods found their way onto the family table. Allen (1977) coined the expression "technological gatekeeper". These rather informal phenomena are key communicators which provide work-related know-how from external organisational sources for scientists, engineers and technicians working in the field of R&D. The gatekeeper resembles the opinion leader who informs himself in time about certain innovations and is appreciated as a counsellor in his primary group (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955).

Even if the findings on the gatekeeper allow for a division of tasks which is specialised on only one key person who solves innovation problems (Allen 1977; Katz 1982; Katz and Tushman 1979), it may still be assumed that performance contributions of other key persons are necessary as well (Chakrabarti and O'Keefe 1977; Maidique 1980; Rothwell et al. 1974; Witte 1977). In general, the gatekeeper is an initiator and promoter. He lacks the dispositive power over resources and the hierarchical power to reward and punish the promoter by authority has (Witte 1977) as well as the capacity to plan and direct the "Prozeßpromotor" has ("champion", Chakrabarti and Hauschildt 1989). By himself, without support from and cooperation with other promoters, he hardly is in a position to develop and push through innovative concepts. The studies on the gatekeeper ignore the cooperation with other role bearers. Furthermore, it remains largely unclear if and how the organisation of the gatekeeper cooperates with external partners.

The question of who initiates information exchange remains open: Are gatekeepers undemanded counsellors, who get into action on their own initiative, because they want to improve their social status and consider the balancing of information deficits as an appropriate means to establish themselves as informal leaders, or do rather the others, who seek advice and want to satisfy information needs, take the initiative and consider the gatekeepers as information sources that are easily accessible, competent and trustworthy?

Both explanations can fit in. Findings of Persson (1981) point out another phenomenon: Well-informed persons preferably look for dialogue partners who are well-informed themselves. Intra- and inter-organisational networks of gatekeepers evolve (Allen 1970, 1977). Whether the well-informed circles prefer to remain among themselves or give their information to others - as put forward in an optimistic view of the gatekeeper - has to be studied more thoroughly on an empirical basis. After all, there are reasons why gatekeepers keep information to themselves.
Thus, the gatekeeper is not the sufficient key person for inter-organisational innovation processes. His role is largely restricted to importing and distributing information or to mediating extra-organisational dialogue partners (Allen et al. 1979; Chakrabarti and O'Keefe 1977; Katz and Tushman 1981) - he is no wheelsman of inter-organisational innovation processes. In order to obtain external information, he will probably offer his own knowledge and information about the own organisation for exchange as well, maybe also to members of competitive enterprises. In this way, the gatekeeper comes close to the boundary spanning roles where an inter-organisational information flow is considered in two directions (Adams 1976; Aldrich and Herker 1977).

In empirical studies, role conflicts and functions of boundary spanning persons are examined by way of examples such as buyers, sellers and negotiation delegations (Friedman and Podolny 1992; Pruden 1969; Spekman 1979). Here, general functions of the organisational relationship management are dealt with. Contributions which are specific for innovations tend to take second place, particularly in comparison to the empirical research on the gatekeeper and the opinion leader.

3 The relationship promoter

3.1 Towards a definition of the relationship promoter

3.1.1 Barriers of inter-organisational cooperation

(a) The barrier of "no knowledge of each other": Often appropriate innovation partners are guessed, but they remain unrecognized. Among others the following reasons account for that: secrecy out of economical or political considerations, geographical and/or cultural distances, rather unknown technologies, needs that have not yet been identified. A search for information does not take place because the chances to find appropriate partners are rated as very small or because the perceived costs and the period of the information search are judged too unfavorably (Witte 1972; Gemünden 1993).

(b) The barrier of "no ability to cooperate": Supposing that two equally fitting partners have come to know each other and that a cooperation is favourable for both of them. In order to use these advantages and to avoid risks, distances have to be eliminated: a common language must be found (Katz and Tushman 1979), a common problem definition must be elaborated, the project partners on both sides must be determined, the organisation as well as the financing etc. must be clarified to make the cooperation possible (Gibson and Smilor 1991; Williams and Gibson 1990).
(c) The barrier of "no will to cooperate": Oppositional behaviour may be quite evident or remain hidden as well and be active or passive at the same time. It can be directed against the innovation in general (Katz and Allen 1982) and against persons, objects, decisions, opinions, and adaptation processes (Leonard-Barton 1988) in particular. Interaction opposition may well be met by factual arguments, but they must not finally lead to a change of attitude in the sense of cooperation on the side of the opponents as people often behave irrationally, because they are intellectually overstrained or consciously forgo a cognitive dealing with problems (Van de Ven 1986). In addition to that, the safeguarding of personal and/or organisational interests may for example be a reason that exchange processes are not desired (Schrader 1991).

(d) The barrier of "no permission to cooperate": Individual and organisational activity is also determined by commandments and prohibitions. For example, political and religious settings, moral codes and maxims, organisation and controlling systems (Macdonald 1993) as well as opponents by power may prohibit a cooperation with a partner.

3.1.2 Performance contributions of the relationship promoter

The following performance contributions effected in by the relationship promoter:

(a) Contacting persons: There are partners with whom one is not allowed, willing or able to talk to oneself. Relationship promoters are called upon in order to remain unknown for the partner or to avoid direct relations with him, e. g. because this is politically undesired. Furthermore, finances or lack of time may impede direct communication.

(b) Bringing persons together: The relationship promoter must not necessarily carry on the dialogue with the representatives of interest exclusively himself. He can or must restrict himself to bringing parties together or assist them in their dialogue, like e. g. the mediator whose presence enables the parties at variance to talk to each other in such a way as to listen to and understand each other.

The relationship promoter does not only bring parties together, he also promotes the establishment of coalitions between key partners.

(c) Carrying on the dialogue with persons: The relationship promoter is especially suited to bridge intercultural, interdisciplinary, and interpersonal distances. He is able to understand the partners A and B to be brought together and to be understood by them as well. This relates to the language, the expertise and the hermeneutic competence, i.e. the ability to evaluate inconsistencies between the opinion expressed and the actual intention behind it.
Thus, the relationship promoter is able to carry on a fruitful dialogue with the partners to be linked together.

(d) Promoting social bonds: The relationship promoter influences directly and/or indirectly the attitude of his dialogue partners so that paramount social aims can be realized, e.g. the establishment of trust and commitment between the interaction partners. Important for this is the handling of the cooperations' critical phases as well as the development and mediation of proposals for regulating the conflict. It is also possible that the function of forming inter-organisational teams and the creation of an own social identity for such groups is added.

3.1.3 Power sources of the relationship promoter

The power sources of the relationship promoter consist of his already established network and his abilities to make use of this network and to add new network relationships.

How do relationship promoters come to their networks? Which characteristics allow them to enter into, maintain and use their relationships? The following explanations can be thought of:

(a) Persons are attractive partners in a social system because of certain personal characteristics.

- Persons who dispose of a certain amount of expert knowledge are able to lead professional conversations with potential problem solvers as well as assess their need of problem solving within a sufficient reliability. Persons who are competent in their fields are more likely to be asked for advice and to be accepted by experts as undemanded counsellors as well as mediators (Allen 1977). Expert knowledge is helpful in order to influence external partners (Adams 1976).

- Relationship promoters acquire or already dispose of sufficient knowledge about the (potential) cooperation partners. This relates among others to their willingness and ability to cooperate with each other as well as to the risks that could endanger the cooperation.

- Persons among whom an affinity exists, e.g. relating to the language, value notions, and aims, (Ancona and Caldwell 1988) are more expected to be able and/or willing to maintain exchange relationships.
• Relationship promoters possess the social competence to awaken and keep up the partners' willingness to interact, once they are found.

• Relationship promoters develop or possess an identification power (referent power) with respect to their partners which is particularly useful when it comes to exert influence beyond organisational frontiers.

• Relationship promoters dispose of the necessary experience of how to detect appropriate partners and win them over for a cooperation. They are aware of the typical relationship conflicts and pay attention to a foresighted conflict management, where conflicts are spoken out openly in good time and binding agreements are made.

(b) Persons are attractive partners because of a certain position in a social system.

• Persons with high hierarchically legitimated power are attractive partners because of their decision competence and their pervasion potential as well as the resources they dispose of, as e.g. promoters by authority on the side of the user organisation with respect to the innovation supplier (Gemünden 1981, 1985).

• Position bearers of lower ranking, like e.g. project managers, are favored in taking over relationship promoter role, since possibilities (e.g. a time budget) are granted to them in order to enter into and maintain contacts and relationships to external partners (Ancona and Caldwell 1992). Furthermore it can be expected that external partners hold project managers for competent dialogue partners. There are a number of other proposals coming from the business practice. Among them are the "product manager" (Diller 1975) and the "key account manager" (Diller 1993; Kemna 1979). The proposals are embedded in certain management concepts.

• Relationship promoters dispose of a strong network. They already know appropriate internal and external cooperation partners or persons who could provide contacts to potential partners. Connected to a high network centrality is the access to information and the possibility to control it, which presents a power source for relationship promoters.

Consequently, we understand the relationship promoter as a person who actively and intensively advances inter-organisational exchange processes by good personal relationships to key actors who dispose of critical resources.
A relationship promoter has the more power, the more important the resources are that his dialogue partners bring in, the more efficiently he reaches these partners, the more he can lead the dialogue with them or advance their exchange processes, and the less third parties are able or authorized to fulfill this function.

The factually achieved combination of characteristics of a promoter does of course leave an imprint on the behavior. A person who is both promoter by authority and relationship promoter contacts different partners and interacts differently with these than a person who is both promoter by expertise and relationship promoter or a pure relationship promoter. It can be assumed that the advantages of a role accumulation heavily depend on the respective barriers to be surmounted. For example, in the case of acceptance problems relating to the introduction of a new technology, a person who is both promoter by expertise and relationship promoter should be in a better position to transmit the necessary know-how and the conviction for the new technology.

3.2 Efficiency hypotheses relating to the relationship promoter

Relationship promoters advance the initiation, piloting, development, and exploitation processes in innovation cooperations. They limit the likelihood and the extent of damage by existing or possible risks.

1. Initiation (launching interaction): Relationship promoters know or find potential innovation partners and are able to evaluate reliably enough their capacity and willingness to cooperate. The key position heightens the willingness of the partners to exchange and invest. The relationship promoter achieves this through the knowledge of the objectives, requirements and needs of the partners and is so in a position to advertise a cooperation.

2. Piloting process (organisational interaction): The relationship promoter contributes to the formulation of the mutual objectives and the early identification of objective conflicts. He advertises common objectives and starts a planning process which examines their feasibility and produces commitments that safeguard the achievement of the objectives. He takes care that a common report system and a mutually binding organisation are adopted.

3. Development process (problem solving interaction): Relationship promoters advance the learning process between the cooperation partners. Their contribution is that the innovation partners formulate their problem solving needs as well as their problem solving potentials timely and completely and that they are perceived and understood by the other party. Along with that, the promotion may be that the relationship promoter transmits the information to
the right addressee, prepares its form and contents and/or that he brings about the direct communication between the partners (Gemünden 1981).

Problems that arise if the partners have to agree on the specification of the entire system can also be solved by a relationship promoter. If both partners contribute the same kind of performance, the relationship promoter can be of assistance in bringing about a common basis for decisions regarding the amount and point of time of the performances to be made. Objectives are not given, they change (Hauschildt 1977). The range of possible actions changes as well. Finally, the basis of knowledge changes: Aspired or already implemented ways of solutions are recognized as unrealizable dead ends. Such changes occur on both sides and must be mutually communicated if the partner is directly or indirectly affected. Relationship promoters contribute in identifying and communicating changes in time so that an appropriate reaction is made possible.

4. Exploitation process (realization and conflict handling interaction): During a cooperation the partners directly or indirectly obtain performance revenues by exploiting knowledge, rights, products and/or services. Relationship promoters assist in identifying and making use of exploitation possibilities.

With respect to the aspired exploitation possibilities, changes may occur that are analogous to those of the development, so that the above line of argument suits again.

Moreover, different opinions occur relating to how the jointly elaborated "cake" should be divided. The risks involved can be limited by relationship promoters: They contribute to a clearer formulation of the mutual claims and to the development of an adequate consciousness for the mutual performance and consideration. If and as far as the relationship promoter is experienced in the dealing with typical cooperation conflicts, he will take care of solving these conflicts as well as pursue an effective claim-management.

Relationship promoters assist in reducing undesired flow-out of know-how - be it to partners or to third parties. The key person is aware of who needs and who offers which information. In such a way he can take care that the information, according to its form and contents, will reach the correct addressee. Furthermore, he knows which information the partner already disposes of and, therefore, he can evaluate the possible damage of a flow-out of know-how.

We summarize our notions in the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1:

If inter-organisational innovation processes are advanced by relationship promoters, a technologically greater success is achieved in the cooperation result.
Hypothesis 2:

If inter-organisational innovation processes are advanced by relationship promoters, an economically greater success is achieved in the cooperation result.

Apart from these factual contributions, the relationship promoter delivers important social contributions: The relationship promoter is able to reduce distances caused by mentality between the partners, to awaken understanding for the position and objective of the partner as well as to advance the establishment of trust and commitment.

Social distances may result among others from different organisational cultures, enterprise sizes, incentive systems, time horizons and professional orientations. Moreover, the feeling of a distance is strengthened by a lack of information and knowledge about the partner (Hallén and Wiedersheim-Paul 1979). The relationship promoter functions as a constant linking element between the partner organisations by transmitting, mediating, and representing the notions, demands and needs of each partner towards the other organisation. At the same time, he fosters the direct, personal communication between the organisation members of both partners. Personal contacts and the exchange of information are suitable means to overcome social distances (Gabarro 1990; Hallén and Wiedersheim-Paul 1979).

Hypothesis 3:

If inter-organisational innovation processes are advanced by relationship promoters, this will lead to a decrease in social distance between the partners.

The social interaction also strengthens the ability to understand the partner's position and objectives and to respond to him. Business relationships in which the actors have an appreciation of each other, will stand out for their partners' readiness to tolerate the idiosyncrasies of each other and to make allowances when problems occur. Appreciation may contribute to bridge the social distance perceived towards a partner (Hallén and Sandström 1991).

Hypothesis 4:

If inter-organisational innovation processes are advanced by relationship promoters, this will lead to a higher level of understanding among the partners.

Numerous authors stress the importance of a stable trust relationship for an inter-organisational (innovation) cooperation (e.g. Håkansson 1982; Hallén and Sandström 1991; Lundvall 1988; Wilson and Mummalaneni 1986; Young and Wilkinson 1989). Trust is
considered to be the initiator and guiding mechanism for partner specific adaptation and learning processes (Dodgson 1993; Hallén et al. 1991; Van de Ven and Walker 1984), i.e. for the launching and deepening of (exchange) relationships (Moorman et al. 1992). Trust facilitiates the coordination of a cooperation (Anderson and Narus 1990; Ring and Van de Ven 1994).

Apart from the pure business exchange, the social exchange is of paramount importance for the development of trust (Moorman et al. 1993). This exchange is effected, above all, by personal face-to-face contacts, combined with a functioning flow of information (Hallén and Wiedersheim-Paul 1979). Personal characteristics, such as integrity, openness, consistency in behavior, reliability, and competence are also important factors in the development of trust (Gabarro 1978). At the same time, it will be easier for two or more partners to develop trust in each other on the basis of understanding and social affinity.

**Hypothesis 5:**

If inter-organisational innovation cooperations are advanced by relationship promoters, this will lead to a higher level of trust among the partners.

The wish to cooperate can be attributed primarily to rational considerations regarding a positive net benefit or an economic surplus (Axelrod 1984). Apart from that, the willingness to cooperate can be promoted by a policy of clarity and unity of objectives as well as by performance and consideration (Wilson and Mummalaneni 1986). The relationship promoter contributes to the exchange of needed information at the right time, in the right form as well as in the right way and manner between the cooperation partners. Adaptations in the course of transmitting information are often evaluated as an indication for an inner obligation (commitment) and a sincere interest in a relationship (Anderson and Weitz 1992).

With the action on a mutual basis, the so-called "mirror of trust" (Ford et al. 1986), the relationship promoter signals a long-term orientation and continuity of the cooperation. This motivates the partners to further actions and contributes to a positive attitude of expectations (Gundlach et al. 1995). According to Lund's opinion, a higher resistance towards conflicts is to be expected in long-term relationships (Lund 1991). Even when expectations are not fulfilled, e.g. regarding the provision of needed resources by the partner, the business relationship is not immediately discontinued (Seabright et al. 1992). The relationship promoter stabilizes the relationship.
Hypothesis 6:

If inter-organisational innovation cooperations are advanced by relationship promoters, this will lead to a stronger commitment among the partners.

3.3 Further considerations on the relationship promoter

The role concept of the relationship promoter presented in this paper leads to several questions:

(1) Is it useful to ask for a unification of relationship promoting functions in one person - the relationship promoter? As an alternative, the tasks of the relationship management could be divided on several persons.

(2) Relationship promoters often work together with further relationship promoters in other organisations, so that social networks of relationship promoters are established. How is this cooperation effected? Which specific role demands arise from the membership in relationship promoter networks?

Ad (1) Relationship maintenance - social position or role segment?

There are numerous examples where the promoting of relationships is distributed on several position bearers. According to the criterion of the phase of the cooperation one can, e. g. differentiate between the initiators or solicitors and executors. According to the contents, relationship promoters can be differentiated which are responsible for commercial, juridicial, organisational or social questions, so that e. g. the problem untangling/resolving and conflict handling interaction are supported by different relationship promoters. Rated according to the criterion "hierarchical degree", a specialization of relationship promoters could be thought of in a way that the relationship promoter type 1 brings together top-managers and the relationship promoter type 2 advances the dialogue on the middle level. Additionally, a differentiation could be made between scout and ambassador roles (Friedman and Podolny 1992).

These specializations occur because the capacity of one single person does not suffice (declaration of capacity), because the dialogue with certain persons implies specific requirements (declaration of qualification), or because the control of the relationship to innovation partners represents a power source one wants to dispose of or because there is an interest in maintaining an obtained balance of power (declaration of power maintenance).
The specialization of relationship promoters leads to the establishment of a work-divided structure. However, instead of only one, there exist several interfaces with the cooperation partner. These interfaces must be coordinated in order to direct the entire cooperation to one homogeneous objective.

The higher need of coordination between the partners arising out of this may lead to a stronger degree of formalisation and control. Consequently, it is to be expected that the cooperation partners will more keenly safeguard and mark off their competences. The predetermination and limitation of ranges of action may lead to mistrust and conflicts between the partners since they will endeavor to safeguard their flexibility and independence as well as their identity (Ring and Van de Ven 1994).

Persons who are designated to solve specific problems in the first place in the framework of an inter-organisational cooperation meet unfavorable conditions, caused by the frequently fixed duration of the activity and the given narrow ranges of action, in order to enter and maintain personal relationships. Furthermore, role conflicts can be expected more often (Kahn et al. 1964). In addition to that, cooperation barriers may exist in the cooperation of specialists of different departments which lead among others to an impediment of the social exchange.

We favor the concentration of relationship promoting functions in one social position in order to make the best use of the resource "business and social relationship" to an innovation partner. In our set-up, the relationship promoter is a personality who adjusts the relationship strategically and identifies, broadens, develops, protects, and uses its potentials. This responsibility should be laid on one single person. The relationship promoter should be evaluated according to the entire success of the relationship and, if necessary, he should also recommend to disinvest or to discontinue the relationship. If different persons take over relationship promoting functions, this does not necessarily lead to a harmonious orchestra - if the conductor is missing in the first place.

Ad (2) Cooperation between relationship promoters from different organisations

In his "home"-organisation the relationship promoter disposes of a stronger network since he can enter, maintain and use personal relationships more efficiently there than in the organisation of the respective cooperation enterprise. Furthermore, it can be assumed that employees of the own organisation rather consider the relationship promoter as a loyal partner than an external person (Brewer 1979). The relationship promoter can, therefore, unfold his influence in the first place if it comes to a fruitful division of labor and/or concentration of the forces together with a relationship promoter of the partner organisation.
in the case of the interactions described above. For this reason, relationship promoters should offer each other help and make use of that offer when e. g. negotiated compromises should be pushed through and led to intra-organisational acceptance.

It is to be expected that relationship promoters who belong to two or more organisations that are willing to cooperate or do already cooperate know about the respective advantages of each other in the own organisation and consequently enter or maintain the contact in order to stimulate, coordinate and/or control mutually the interlinking performances. Along with this it may be assumed that interaction norms evolve that regulate the cooperation of relationship promoters.

It may further be assumed that transaction costs (e. g. coordination and control costs) can be saved by a well-established cooperation between the relationship promoters. Good personal relations between the relationship promoters will contribute to a higher stability of the business relationship since they feel obligated to each other and therefore engage themselves more strongly for the interests of the partner (Ring and Van de Ven 1994).

**Hypothesis 7:**

If relationship promoters of two cooperating organisations work together, the result of the cooperation is better than in an inter-organisational cooperation where a relationship promoter is present in only one of the partner organisations.

**4 Implications and directions for future research**

Cooperating with external technology partners increases innovation success and hence company success. This is true for all companies regardless of their size. Thus, cooperation with external partners is not a matter-of-course process which runs automatically. For example small and medium-sized companies have fewer technology-oriented external relationships compared to large companies, which is due to size-specific cooperation barriers (Gemünden and Heydebreck 1995a; Rothwell and Dodgson 1991). Therefore, it is a central management task in technology-oriented external relationships to surmount these cooperation barriers between innovation partners in order to bridge the gap between people and institutions so that the potentials of the partners can be connected timely and in the right way.

Our considerations concerning the relationship promoter have shown that he is especially qualified to surmount inter-organisational barriers of "no knowledge of each other", "no ability to cooperate", "no will to cooperate" and "no permission to cooperate", to strategically
adjust technology-oriented external relationships, and to identify, protect, build up and use their potentials.

For the achievement of technological as well as economical innovation success it is absolutely necessary for a company to bring its technology-oriented external relationships into line with its innovation targets in particular and its competitive strategy in general (Gemünden and Heydebreck 1995b). This leads to the necessity of an efficient coordination of technology-oriented external relationships which means that the responsibility for the management of technology-oriented external relationships should rest with only one person. This assures that the requirements, demands and goals of one's own company will match with the competences of external partners. Based on this judgement, technology partners can be chosen and acquired according to the specific needs of a company, and the resources necessary for organising and maintaining external relationships can be calculated and therefore their availability can largely be assured.

With the relationship promoter we propose a normative model for the initiation, organisation, maintenance and especially for the coordination of relationships to external cooperation partners. We derive efficiency hypotheses which can be tested by empirical research. This hypothesis testing as well as the discussion of open questions is part of our ongoing empirical work.

In order to draw conclusions relevant to management, there still has to be done much research concerning the questions of how relationship promoters can be identified or acquired and which general conditions enable and motivate key persons to fulfil the postulated relationship-promoting functions. Moreover, the question of how the characteristics of and the way of acting as a relationship promoter can be imparted.
List of references


